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XXVI.

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THE NAMELESS MAN.

PROLOGUE.

THE summer of 1846 was drawing to a close. On a magnificent day in September two revenue officers were on duty on the steep coast which borders the entrance to the Gulf of Saint-Tropez, on the Var.

It was near mid-day, and the heat was tropical. In order to shelter themselves from the sun they had thrown themselves down in the shade of a clump of mastic trees, which protected them completely, and close to a spring, whose neighbourhood kept them in some degree cool. At their feet the Mediterranean, calm and smooth as a lake, stretched away as far as the eye could reach.

Such weather is by no means favourable for smugglers, and the chances of making a capture were but slight. Besides this, not a sail was in sight. Blue everywhere, saving only a small black spot on the horizon, which might be either a cloud or a rock.

At the end of half an hour it seemed to the two revenue officers that this black point was increasing in size. An hour afterwards there could be no more doubt on the subject : the object was a boat, and this boat was steering straight for the coast. There was nothing in this but what was perfectly natural.

At the end of two hours the boat was within gunshot of the beach, and its occupant was plainly distinguishable. He was alone, and was vigorously plying his two oars ; he stopped from time to time and seemed to be looking out for some particular spot on the beach. The two officers, lying on the top of the cliff, were completely invisible.

Presently the rower appeared to have found what he was in search of, for he approached the land, leapt on shore, and beached his boat so that the tide should not carry it off. After this operation he took another look at the coast, as if to make certain that it was deserted, and, no doubt satisfied by the result of his examination, he began to run quickly towards the cliffs.

The officers came to the conclusion that these proceedings were worth watching, and they watched.

The man climbed, without hesitating, a narrow path which led straight to the spring. They had now a close view of him. He was

not a fisherman on the coast: the revenue officers know all of them.

It was strange, to say the least of it.

Arrived on the top of the cliff, the man stopped a moment, looked around him, and, seeing no one, he ran to the spring, threw himself flat down and began to drink greedily.

He was evidently dying with thirst. He drank long and deeply, dipped his head, sprinkled himself with water, and dabbled about for quite a quarter of an hour. Then he arose, looked around him once more, and appeared to be preparing to return to his boat.

The two officers thought this a favourable moment for appearing. They had not come to any definite conclusion with regard to this man; but it seemed to them strange that any one should come from the open sea expressly to drink at a spring.

They stood up, then, all at once, and their sudden appearance produced an extraordinary effect on the drinker. He began at once to rush down the cliff in the direction of his boat. He ran like a goat, and with every appearance of a man to whom the country was familiar.

A man who bolts is always a suspicious character, and he is, no matter in what country, always pursued. The revenue officers took good care not to break through this custom; they ran after the fugitive and laid their hands on his collar just as he was gaining his boat.

The man struggled vigorously; but after a short tussle he was thrown to the ground and securely bound. He had the frightened look of a wild beast caught in a trap, and his forehead bore the mark of a recent wound. His dress consisted of a pair of sail-cloth trousers and a straw hat as full of holes as a colander. No coat, no shirt, no shoes. The sailors of Provence do not dress like the boatmen of the Seine; but at any rate they do dress, and the stranger was not dressed at all.

Such a scanty costume as this was eminently suspicious. Things looked still worse when the boat came to be examined; it was as bare as the man who had occupied it: it contained two oars, and nothing else. No mast, sail, nor tiller; no provisions, not even a vessel of water; no name nor number on the stern.

The officers began to question the stranger, but they could get no answer from him. Much embarrassed by their capture, they decided to take him to the nearest town, which owned a magistrate and a prison. The man allowed himself to be taken without resistance, and without saying a word. It was only on arriving at the prison that he opened his mouth to say, "I am hungry."

They gave him some regulation bread, which he devoured in a few minutes, and went to fetch the magistrate, who questioned him without obtaining any answer, and who, not knowing very well what to do with him, sent him off between two gendarmes to the headquarters of the district, as a vagabond.

A vagabond of the sea !

There the magistrate tried in his turn to make this strange prisoner speak. But all his cleverness, which had so often confounded the tricks of prisoners, was as nought in face of a most simple defence.

The stranger told no lies : he said not a word.

Under this obstinate silence the vulgar misdemeanour of vagabondage assumed the proportions of a grave criminal offence. A man who refuses to say what he is, what he has done, from whence he has come, must have weighty reasons for silence, when he knows that this refusal may be the means of confining him to prison for a lengthy period. Besides, an almost naked man does not come and refresh himself on a deserted coast ; a man does not take to the sea, without clothes, without water, and without provisions in a boat without a number.

There was a mystery there which very probably concealed a crime.

But what crime ?

The first idea which presented itself was that of a massacre on the high seas, committed by the mutinous crew of some vessel ; but in that case, how had this unfortunate man come to be abandoned in a ramshackle boat ?

Another circumstance added further to the obscurity in which this affair was involved. In order to find the spring, which could not be seen from the sea, he must have been acquainted with the coast. The man, then, had been in that part of the country before, although not one of the inhabitants recognised him. An examination of his person failed to throw any light on the mystery. He was neither old nor young, neither handsome nor ugly, neither fat nor lean. He was not what one would have called a man of a superior class, but yet he was neither a peasant nor a sailor. In a word, it was perfectly easy to see what he was not ; it was impossible to see what he was.

In the presence of this living enigma the magistrate found himself much embarrassed. He was young and full of zeal ; he had at his disposal the numerous and powerful means with which the law is armed, and he resolved, if necessary, to put them all into force.

He began by summoning detectives from the galley at Toulon, for the man might simply be an escaped prisoner. The detectives declared that they had no acquaintance with him.

He wrote to the public prosecutors of France and Italy, sending them the description of the individual, and asking whether it did not apply to some fugitive from the law. He received answers in the negative from both.

He wrote to all the neighbouring seaport towns to inquire whether a boat had been stolen from any of them. None of the descriptions received in reply appeared to answer to the prisoner's boat.

The magistrate resolved to have recourse to those wretches who

in prison patter are called *moutons*; that is to say, the poor devil had two companions who were charged to watch him and make him talk. They had their labour for their pains. Their companion, who talked willingly enough on indifferent topics, slipped through their fingers directly the slightest allusion was made to his adventures.

Finally, extreme measures had been used; the names of several escaped criminals were selected whose description tallied with that of the stranger, and during the night, in the middle of his sleep, he was suddenly awoke by being called by one of these names. It was hoped that if they chanced on his he would not be able to control his first movement of recognition.

A complete failure was the result.

By this time the affair had assumed the proportions of a struggle between the magistrate and the man-riddle, in which the pride of the former was at stake. But it was impossible to prolong the situation indefinitely and to keep the stranger in prison until he chose to speak.

Abandoning the struggle, the magistrate sent him to take his trial as a vagabond. The affair attracted to the court the whole population of the little town, and even a few strangers who had come to pass the autumn in Provence.

One of them, Viscount Henri de Servon, a college friend of the magistrate, with whom he had come to stay for a month, had interested himself in this story with all the curiosity of an idle Parisian. He had been to see the stranger in prison, and he sat in the front row in the court. The prisoner did not present himself in the all too scanty costume which he had worn in his boat. He had been clothed in prison dress: vest and trousers of coarse woollen stuff.

He was a man of rather more than medium height, and must have been about forty-five or fifty years old. His hair and his beard, which he wore full, were still quite black. His rather irregular features were not unpleasing, and his brown eyes had a gentle and intelligent expression. His tanned face denoted some out-door occupation, such as that of a hunter or sailor. His hands, without being those of a labourer, bore traces of work. His speech was correct and free from accent.

People expected a dramatic trial; they were completely disappointed. The prisoner remained calm, mute, impenetrable. He was plied with questions; traps were set for him; the consequences of his stubbornness were represented to him. In vain.

The stranger's obstinate quietness never forsook him, and on hearing the sentence which condemned him, for vagabondage, to the maximum penalty—imprisonment for a year and a day—he had the appearance of a man who is resigned to all the consequences of a fixed determination.

It had been necessary to give him a name, in order to baptise the sentence, so to speak, and they called him Jacques, as the prison warders had already done for their own convenience' sake.

A few days afterwards The Nameless Man was conducted to a prison in a neighbouring department.

The curtain had fallen before the conclusion of the drama.

Henri de Servon had become excited over this unanswerable riddle, as he would have become excited over a large bet at his club, and before returning to Paris he took it into his head to deposit with the authorities five hundred francs to be given to the prisoner at the expiration of his sentence.

It was an investment to the profit of his curiosity. He said to himself that when he had once done with justice, the stranger would repay him with the story of his adventures.

His calculations deceived him.

A year afterwards the viscount learnt that the man had passed twelve months in prison without betraying his identity, and that he had gone to live in Marseilles under police supervision.

But this was all. The man without a name gave no sign of life. He did not even write to return thanks, although the money had been duly paid over to him when he came out of prison.

The revolution of February happened a short time afterwards, and Henri de Servon had almost forgotten the story, when towards the end of the year 1848 he found himself engaging in adventures far more extraordinary.

I.

THE political events which occupied the first few months of the year 1848 left men but little time to think of other matters. The interest which is usually bestowed on the curiosities of the courts of law was fully occupied by the street fights, and the singular episodes which occurred about this time in the highest Parisian society passed almost unnoticed.

After the revolution of February the fashionable clubs remained for a long time deserted ; but towards the end of the summer those who remained faithful to a life about town began to resume their usual existence. The diners again frequented the Café de Paris. The theatres gradually filled ; and card and supper-parties again came into vogue.

Card-parties especially. It appeared as if people were anxious to make up for a forced interruption, and they set to work with an ardour which possibly was to be explained by the uncertainty which lasted as to the future. In one of the most celebrated clubs in Paris especially the high players met, and every night at a baccarat-table in the middle of the great red room enormous sums were won and lost. From the heaps of gold and bank-notes on the green cloth it was impossible to imagine that trade was in a dreadful state, and that rents were collected with difficulty. The money, which men concealed in various places and took good care not to invest,

appeared in any quantity on these occasions, and changed hands with incredible rapidity between one and five o'clock in the morning. One day, towards the end of October, and at the very height of this fever, one of the most assiduous frequenters of the club suddenly ceased to appear there.

He was a very rich young man from Languedoc, who had come to pass the winter in Paris, and who for the last month had won large sums there.

At first but little notice was taken of his absence, for the intimacy between gamblers is rarely extended beyond the card-table, but it was presently discovered that he had not appeared at home for several days past.

His family were uneasy, and a search was instituted. Monsieur de Sieurac—such was his name—had left the club one morning about four o'clock, and from the moment that he had passed out of the door all trace of him had disappeared.

It was probable that, according to his usual custom, he had taken a cab to drive to the Faubourg Saint-Germain, where he resided; but all the drivers who were questioned could give no information on the subject. One alone stated that on the night in question he had driven to the station of the Rouen railway a traveller whose description tallied in some measure with that of the missing man. But it was difficult to believe that at that hour of the night, without luggage, and in evening dress, Monsieur de Sieurac had started for some unknown destination.

The idea of suicide was mooted.

It is a supposition always admissible in the case of a gambler. But, besides the fact that he was very wealthy, Monsieur de Sieurac had always been lucky at cards, and on the very night of his disappearance he had won a large sum.

It was not known that he had any trouble on his mind. It would have been madness to think that a man so favourably situated with regard to mind and fortune should have gone and thrown himself into the Seine after a joyous and profitable night.

It was more natural to believe that a crime had been committed, and it was told how that in Monsieur de Sieurac's pocket-book there was ample temptation for thieves, who during that time of financial depression seldom came across such windfalls.

But for the last two years the bands of ruffians who infested the streets of Paris towards the end of Louis Philippe's reign had entirely disappeared. The last survivors of these redoubtable hordes of criminals had been tried and convicted in 1846, and since that time nocturnal attacks had entirely ceased.

The inquiries set on foot by the police in this direction were fruitless. The only discovery which was made was Monsieur de Sieurac's pocket-book, which was picked up, torn and soiled, on the waste ground which in those days lay near the Barrière du Roule.

It is needless to say that this pocket-book was empty.

There all traces ceased.

The river and canal were dragged in vain. The body of Monsieur de Sieurac was not discovered.

His strange disappearance was a nine days' wonder in Paris, but at the end of that time Paris had forgotten it ; and at the club, where Monsieur de Sieurac was well known and much liked, his probable death did not cause baccarat to cease for a single night.

A month had not passed when an adventure—a less tragic one, it is true—happened to one of the most regular players at the club. He was an officer in the army of Africa, who had come to pass a few months' leave in Paris. He was rich, and a determined player ; but he indulged in his favourite passion with military regularity.

At midnight he took his seat at the baccarat-table, and at three o'clock precisely, win or lose, he left off.

At a few minutes past three he would be strolling home on foot to the Rue de Bourgogne, whistling some old African march.

As a rule he played with marked ill-luck ; but when by chance fortune favoured him he took advantage of it with all the ardour of a Spahi accustomed to impetuous charges, and his winnings on these occasions were very large.

One evening, or rather one morning, as he was going home, after having won a hardly-contested battle, he fancied he saw some suspicious-looking shadows gliding along the wall of a large garden at the corner of the Quai d'Orsay.

Captain Laverdan was too well accustomed to a war of ambuscades in Algeria not to mistrust shady corners, and he knew that on a suspicious road it is advisable not to turn a corner too sharply. He took care, then, to walk in the middle of the path, and as an additional precaution he unsheathed a short sword concealed in his cane. At the same time he walked towards the entrance to the Rue de Bourgogne, keeping a military look-out, that is to say, casting his eyes right and left.

A step, a glance.

It was well that he was on his guard. Just as he was passing a low door in the wall of the Palais Bourbon he saw a man rush upon him, and felt himself seized from behind. A powerful hand clutched his neck and another hand sought his breast pocket.

But the captain had not forgotten his lessons in the fencing-school. He administered a back cut which made his aggressor loose his hold, and turned round quickly to face the enemy. The blow must have taken effect, for the thief staggered ; but at this moment two other rascals came to the rescue, and the officer thought it prudent to beat a retreat.

He was not pursued.

The next day this story was the talk of the club. This time there was no doubt on the subject : it was an organised night attack, and the police, to whom the captain stated the facts, set vigorously to work,

One of the assailants must have been badly wounded, for he had plentifully bathed the pavement of the quiet Rue de Bourgogne with his blood ; by the aid of this clue the chief of the police was confident of laying his hands on the gang. When a crime of this kind is committed it is known pretty nearly among what class of criminals the guilty party is to be found, and a sword-wound does not disappear in one day.

But the lowest lodging-houses and taverns were searched in vain ; no tidings were heard of a wounded man. The band, if there had been one, had once more vanished like a phantom.

There was nothing to connect this attempted robbery with the very probable death of Monsieur de Sieurac, and yet the two adventures bore a remarkable similarity to one another. The captain who had been so fortunately saved, and the young man who had so sadly disappeared, both carried about them a large sum, and both had just been winning largely at baccarat. If the robbers were aware of this circumstance, they must have had their information from some one who had seen the game. Incredulous as this supposition appeared, the police, by nature mistrustful, deemed it not unnecessary to conduct some quiet investigations at the club. They made inquiries as to the servants ; they watched them, and they discovered absolutely nothing. The sole result of all these efforts was a kind of general uneasiness at the club. Men looked at and observed one another. Suspicion was in the air. But a trifle such as this had no effect on the play.

Henri de Servon was away when these singular events happened. After the revolution of February he had left Paris to go and sell an estate in Brittany, and he had been detained in the country much longer than he had foreseen.

He was at that time a man of thirty, with all the faults and good qualities of the times and the society in which he lived. Well-born, well-educated, and sufficiently intelligent, he had wasted all these advantages in consequence of an incurable frivolity and an immoderate taste for an idle life. But for all that, although he had compromised his fortune and wasted his life, he had not become vicious. The rather vulgar indulgences which he practised had led him into imprudences, had caused him to cultivate dangerous relations, but at least they had not spoiled his heart. The accident of birth and his surroundings had made of him what was then called a fast man.

At heart he was curious and inquisitive, and his only real passion was for the unknown. Late events had helped to wreck his already embarrassed means ; he had prolonged his stay in Brittany in order to try and remedy this to some extent, and he had returned to Paris with the resolution to be economical and prudent.

Since his return he had even systematically abstained from setting foot in the club. One evening, however, disgusted at a tedious performance which he had sat through at some small theatre, he took it into his head to break through this rule. To his great surprise he

found a most animated group before the large fire in the large room.

It was evident that some extraordinary event had just taken place. Every one was talking at once. Henri de Servon could make nothing of the conversation at first, but he finally caught a few disjointed sentences.

“Poor baron!” said one. “It’s really too hard on him, after winning a good stake for once in a way.”

“They say he’s very ill.”

“From blows or from fright?”

“That which must vex him most is that the doctor has put him on low diet until further orders.”

They were evidently talking about the Baron de Saint-Mandrier, a ridiculous individual, well known to Servon, and an assiduous frequenter of the club, where his gluttony had acquired for him an unenviable reputation. The day before, after a heavy dinner, the baron, who as a rule was prudence itself except when at table, had made bold to go in for heavy play. His audacity was rewarded by unheard-of luck, and about three o’clock in the morning he triumphantly left his place, having won one thousand louis, or in other words, about twenty thousand francs.

But the night which had begun so auspiciously finished badly.

As he was walking home to the Rue d’Anjou, the poor baron had been attacked near the expiatory monument of Louis XVI by some thieves, who had half strangled him and taken his money. Details were wanting; but the fact was only too true, and remarks were plentiful.

“These nocturnal ruffians,” said a young man, “are certainly favoured by luck, and they seem to prefer those who have been fortunate at play.”

Upon which one of the most animated of the group cried :

“Then a good plan would be to begin a game for high stakes, with this stipulation, that the winners shall return home on foot. We shall see whether the gang is well informed.”

The proposal was enthusiastically accepted.

Servon, who had no desire to take any part in the proceedings, ended by letting himself be tempted, promising himself at the same time to play a very cautious game. But one high player is often enough to affect a game, and on that evening there was one present who was quite capable of causing the stakes to run very high indeed. He was a foreigner and had only been a member of the club for a few months. His name was Monsieur de Pancorvo, and it was said that he was charged with a mission from some South American Republic. He passed for being very rich, lived in great style, played very high and very luckily, spoke French purely, and was a perfect master of good manners, a rare quality amongst the citizens born in the neighbourhood of the Equator.

In physique he was what might be called a fine man. Tall, wiry,

broad-shouldered, he appeared to be gifted with uncommon strength, in spite of his age, which was evidently nearly fifty. His features were regular and his eyes remarkably lively and intelligent.

He was very well liked, although he very often won, a circumstance which as a rule does not obtain a man much sympathy in a club.

Servon, on his part, felt a certain repulsion for him, which, however, was not sufficient to prevent him from indulging in that amount of intimacy which is the current coin of club life, and which carries absolutely no further responsibility with it.

He had often played with Monsieur de Pancorvo, and it had even cost him pretty dear, for the foreigner played all games equally well and was as lucky as skilful.

On the evening of the game which they christened on the spot "the baron's game," in honour of the unfortunate Saint-Mandrier's misadventure, luck favoured Servon from the very commencement and remained faithful to him till the end. About four o'clock in the morning he had won sixty-five thousand francs.

The losers consoled themselves by chaffing him. They reminded him that he was bound to return home on foot, and they amused themselves by relating to him all the details of the unfortunate occurrence of the day before. It was remarked that he was not very strong, and that the thieves would find him an easy prey. They talked of the dangerous corners that he had to turn, and they concluded by composing in advance the article which the Police Gazette would not fail to publish next day, and which would naturally end with the time-honoured words, "No arrests have been made."

Servon received this rolling fire with the serenity of a man whom a pocket-book quickly and plentifully furnished has inspired with a gaiety which is proof against any amount of chaff. He stated that he was fully determined to walk home, and in order to prepare himself for the journey he ordered a cold partridge and a bottle of Branne-Mouton.

Monsieur de Pancorvo, who singularly enough had lost, supped at his side. He told him some interesting stories of foreign lands, and it ended by Servon forgetting all about the nocturnal attacks.

Five o'clock was striking as they descended the stairs together, to the great joy of the servants, who had been obliged to sit up for them, for the other players had already gone.

One solitary cab was still holding out on the rank in the street outside. Monsieur de Pancorvo awoke the driver, saying to the viscount :

"I hope you will let me take you home. You live in the Champs-Elysées, I believe, and I at the other end of the Faubourg Saint-Honoré. Your house is on my way, and, besides, you have no choice. There is no other cab in sight."

"No, no," replied Servon ; "I shall walk home. I won to-night, and it is agreed that I have no right to drive. I want to have some

adventures to relate to-morrow, and I shall see whether these bold robbers will be able to recognise in me a capitalist of recent date."

"What! you surely won't be so foolish. Leave those kind of adventures to the poor baron, who is not brave, and who got off cheaply with the loss of his money. If such a thing did happen to you, I am sure that you are the kind of man who would die rather than yield to such rascals without attempting to defend yourself."

"Certainly not. I have peculiar ideas on that subject since I came home from Italy. In that beautiful country I was always careful to carry no arms on me, for fear of shooting a brigand, which is a very dangerous form of sport."

"Then you have not even the Yankee revolver nor the simple truncheon of the policeman?"

"Nothing but my stick. It has a gold knob, and it is my intention to politely offer it to my assassin."

"Well, I certainly don't wish to prevent you from being a hero. So good-night, and good luck!"

Upon this Monsieur de Pancorvo got into the cab, which turned round painfully and began to move off at the rate which hired horses seem to adopt specially at midnight. It had not gone more than a few yards when Servon saw Monsieur de Pancorvo's head appear out of the window, and he thought at first that some one had called him; but he soon saw that he was only talking to the driver and complaining of the pace at which he was going.

Without doubt he found some effectual argument to make him hurry on, for a vigorous cut of the whip applied to the unfortunate horse made it start at full gallop in the direction of the Madeleine.

The viscount put his stick under his arm, his hands in the pockets of his great-coat, and began to walk along the boulevard with the leisurely step of a contented man. It was a splendid night, dry and not too cold, just the kind of weather for a walk after supper.

The road-way and the broad pavements of the boulevard were absolutely deserted, and Servon arrived at the Rue Royale without meeting a soul. A little further on he almost ran up against an individual who emerged from the Rue Saint-Honoré, and who abruptly changed the direction in which he was walking, and took to the footpath on the other side of the road.

Monsieur de Servon was a trifle uneasy. The circumstance reminded him of the baron's adventure, and he thought to himself that this man might very well be a robber who had taken alarm at his martial appearance. At the entrance to the Place de la Concorde, Servon noticed that the man was going in the same direction as himself. He was following him, perhaps. In order to make certain he halted for a moment at the obelisk, and saw that the man slackened his pace.

The viscount began to regret not having accepted Monsieur de Pancorvo's offer; but after hesitating a few seconds he began to feel

ashamed at himself, and walked bravely up the avenue of the Champs-Elysées without looking behind him.

However, just before arriving at the Rond Point he could not resist turning round, and was certain, this time, that the same individual was following him at a distance.

After all, it might be the most natural thing in the world. In spite of this, Servon thought it best to hasten his steps. It was only three minutes' walk from the Rond Point to the street in which he lived, and his anxiety would not last much longer.

He traversed the Allée des Veuves ; but before turning the corner to enter his own street he turned round for the last time, and saw the man fifty yards behind him ; a fact which made his mind quite easy.

At that instant he felt himself clutched by the throat. Before he had time to make a movement a practised hand had twisted his cravat with such force that he was totally unable to breathe. He threw his arms into the air ; his eyes closed ; he sank down, and, without quite fainting, he was conscious of nothing further but a vague sensation. It seemed to him that someone was kneeling on his chest and searching the pockets of his overcoat ; but the whole thing passed so quickly that he was hardly aware of it.

He could not have said how many minutes had passed, when he felt some one loosening his cravat, and heard a voice which said, "I am too late."

He opened his eyes ; a man was leaning over him. By an instinctive movement he attempted to seize him ; but the stranger disengaged himself from his grasp and set off at a run towards the Champs-Elysées. Servon had not had time to distinguish his features, only he seemed to recognise the figure and walk of the man who had followed him.

He rose, and noted with a feeling of lively pleasure that he was not wounded ; but it was with considerably less satisfaction that he discovered that he had been robbed of his pocket-book.

He dragged himself with difficulty as far as his door and entered his house, doleful and crest-fallen.

As soon as the poor viscount recovered possession of his faculties he began to reflect on this stupid adventure. There was no disguising the fact : he had tamely allowed himself to be despoiled, exactly like the Baron de Saint-Mandrier. The very idea of this added to his ill-humour, and he began to ruminate all sorts of plans of vengeance.

He longed for daylight, so as to go and lodge his complaint with the police. Little by little, however, his excitement cooled down, and he thought to himself that it was useless to make public this ridiculous adventure. He had no desire to serve as the text for a conversation around the fire at the club, and the very idea of figuring, under the initial X in the papers exasperated him beyond measure.

After reflecting well he came to the conclusion that his best

course was to swallow his disgrace and his loss without complaint.

Having taken this decision, Servon bathed his neck, around which his cravat had left a prominent red mark, and went to bed.

But he found it impossible to sleep. All the details of this unlucky evening presented themselves with singular clearness to his mind. It was plain that he had been awaited at a spot which it was known he must pass. The attack had been too sudden and too well calculated for him to attribute it to chance.

It was clear, too, that he was known to be possessed of a well-lined pocket-book, since the thief had placed his hand unhesitatingly on the spot where the money was. It must be, then, that a member of the club gave information to the gang, unless he performed the operation himself.

And yet this seemed improbable.

The viscount had read the story of the jeweller Cardillac, who assassinated his customers in order to regain possession of the jewels which he had sold them; but that had happened in the reign of Louis XIV, and this way of making up for one's losses at play seemed hardly practicable in our days. But there were other circumstances which were difficult to understand.

Servon had evidently been followed; but the man who had attacked him could not have been the one who had walked behind him from the Rue Royale, for at the very moment when he had been seized, he had just seen him fifty paces behind him. Now, was this man an accomplice charged with watching his movements, or was he, on the contrary, a detective who was on the robbers' track?

The words which the viscount had heard, "I am too late," seemed to confirm the latter supposition; but, in that case, why had this detective who had been so ready to assist him taken flight as if he was afraid of being recognised?

That which was certain was that he had been robbed and half-strangled, so that he had great difficulty in believing, at least this evening, that whatever is best. Fortunately fatigue finally brought sleep, and for eight hours he slept without moving.

When he opened his eyes, towards mid-day, the drawn curtains only allowed a little light to enter his room, and it was with difficulty that he distinguished a large packet sealed with red wax which his servant had probably just placed on his table. It looked like an official letter, and as the viscount had but few dealings with high functionaries, the sight of the envelope surprised him. He had only to stretch out his hand to grasp it; but he gave himself the pleasure of wondering a little what it could contain.

His thoughts ran smoothly, as with half-closed eyes he looked at the mysterious packet, when the rather ridiculous idea suddenly struck him that the prefect of police had written to him to inform him of the arrest of the man who had robbed him.

Without further reflection he seized the packet and tore open the

envelope. It would be impossible to describe the surprise of Henri de Servon on seeing its contents.

This grey cover concealed a bundle of notes on the Bank of France.

The viscount counted them. There were sixty-five.

His money had been returned to him.

He began already to think that he had not been mistaken and that the police was an admirable institution, when he perceived that under the notes there was a letter. It was a single sheet of common paper, which bore these words, firmly written in a large handwriting with a character of its own :

“Sir,—You can make use of this money without scruple. It is a restitution.”

There was no signature.

Of a truth the adventure was taking a fantastic turn. It was like the commencement of a story from the Arabian Nights. The thief had evidently been despoiled of the fruits of his crime.

The viscount's first thought was to whom he could have rendered a service capable of engendering such a signal proof of gratitude. He racked his memory in vain, he could not recollect ever having saved any one's life, or even honour, which would have been a more difficult task.

Another fact seemed to Servon to be equally mysterious. This providential saviour knew that he was to be robbed that night, since he had kept a watch upon the robber.

In the midst of these reflections an idea occurred to the viscount which seemed to throw some light on the case. It struck him that his adventure was nothing else than a joke arranged at the club. The anonymous restitution completed the mystification, which could hardly with decency be carried to the point of keeping the stolen money.

But the joke had been carried too far. He had been dragged down and half-strangled, and Servon, although quite used to this sort of eccentricity, found this by no means to his liking. His irritation increased when he remembered that it must have been Pancorvo who had taken upon himself the carrying out of this lamentable farce.

He recalled the conversation at the door of the club. Pancorvo had adroitly questioned him as to whether he carried any arms, and no doubt he had driven at full speed and taken up his position at the corner of the Allée des Veuves. Servon had already rather a repugnance for this individual, and he was not particularly sorry to have an excuse for picking a quarrel with him.

He only wanted to make certain of his facts before taking any steps, and he adopted a very simple plan. In order that a mystification should be complete, it is necessary that the victim should learn that he has been mystified, and it was probable that they would not

allow much time to elapse before beginning to chaff him. He resolved, then, to go to the club as usual, to say not a word about his adventure, and to wait until the practical jokers betrayed themselves.

As for the mysterious letter, it had been left at the door about ten o'clock by an unknown messenger. The viscount passed the day in a very excitable state of mind. He was by turns vexed at having served as a butt for idiots, and pleased at having found his money again.

As a matter of fact, the former feeling triumphed, and it was under the influence of unmistakable irritation that he entered the club towards midnight. All the players of the night before were there; but the conversation had been changed to some other topic, and there was a grave discussion going on as to the superiority of English coachmen. There was no more question of the baron's adventure than of the assassination of the Duc de Guise.

From this Servon, with the obstinacy of a man who has one fixed idea in his mind, concluded that things had been preconcerted, and that they were waiting for his story. So, keeping his eyes open at the same time, he launched out upon some particular manner of driving.

To his profound astonishment they listened to him, replied to him, and he saw not the slightest sign of a smile nor of any secret understanding. Monsieur de Pancorvo was playing piquet close by. He bowed to the viscount with his accustomed politeness, and with the most natural air in the world.

This conduct quite disconcerted poor Servon. However, he tried once more to provoke some allusion by referring to the baron, but without success. The wind had changed.

Monsieur de Pancorvo alone seemed disposed for a moment to play into his hand. He asked the viscount whether he had not met with any disagreeable incident, and the latter replied drily that when a man longed for adventures they never happened to him.

The foreigner bowed, as if he did not wish to pursue a distasteful topic of conversation, and quietly went on with his game.

Servon began then to think that the affair was more serious than he had imagined, and that there must really be in the club a thief in disguise. More and more abroad, he returned home much puzzled, taking the precaution to drive this time. He again thought of simply applying to the police; but he reflected that he would have to make a formal statement, give himself no end of trouble, and he finally came to the conclusion again to keep his own counsel.

But, as he was determined to get to the bottom of this ridiculous mystery, the viscount resolved to be his own detective.

II.

ABOUT this time the viscount had very little to employ his time : his heart, as chance would have it, was perfectly free, and his mind had no cares whatever on it. Thus he was in excellent trim for the excitement of a man-chase, but unfortunately he had only very confused ideas on the subject of his new functions.

Of practice he had had absolutely none. So, in order to serve his apprenticeship, he began by gathering some information. A vague instinct made him incline to the belief that the South American, Pancorvo, must be, if not the author, at least the accomplice of the nocturnal attack which had been so adroitly perpetrated on his person. He could not shake off this idea, and he was determined to find out the truth of the mystery.

It was necessary first of all to find out who this man was. At first blush this did not appear a very difficult thing to do. A man does not fall into a club like an ærolite ; he must be introduced by some one.

Servon made inquiries as to who were Monsieur de Pancorvo's introducers, and he learnt that one was the vice-president of the club, a gentleman of good family and undoubted honour. The other, Charles de Précey, happened to be one of his boyish companions and his best friend. Henri went and called on him, and Charles told him all that he knew, which turned out to be uncommonly little.

The year before Précey had undertaken a lengthy voyage in the East, where he met Monsieur de Pancorvo, who was also travelling in the Levant. They had joined company to visit Asia Minor and Palestine and ascend the Nile as far as the second cataract, and during this long and difficult journey the viscount's friend had often had occasion to appreciate the good qualities of his companion. Monsieur de Pancorvo was pleasant and clever. He knew a quantity of languages, and, amongst others, Turkish and Arabic, an invaluable advantage in an Eastern trip.

In addition to this he appeared to be very rich and was provided with ample letters of credit ; but he spoke but little of his private affairs. Précey knew, however, that he possessed a large fortune, thanks to the discovery of a gold-mine, somewhere in an island of the Indian Ocean or in the Cordilleras ; that he had been educated in England, and that it was his intention to make his home in France. On arriving in Paris Monsieur de Pancorvo had begged his travelling-companion to introduce him to his club. The latter had willingly consented, and it had been done with the concurrence of the vice-president, who, without knowing the South American, had relied entirely on Précey's patronage of him.

Since his admission, Pancorvo had led the life of all rich foreigners who come to France to amuse themselves. He frequented

every shade of society ; he went a great deal to the theatres, and appeared in the Bois in well-kept and well-horsed carriages. However, there was some mystery about him. No one had as yet been able to effect an entry into his house. He knew every one in Paris, that is to say, every one of that class who frequent first nights and race-courses ; but he had not an intimate friend in the higher ranks.

This scanty information afforded such little ground for suspicion that Servon began to think that he was on the wrong track. He decided, nevertheless, to extend his inquiries a little farther, but he wanted first to learn how to disguise himself, which is the A B C of the profession. He had frequented theatres enough to know several actors, and he applied to one of them, a master in the art of disguises, on the plausible pretext of having to play in some private theatricals.

In a few weeks he learnt to make himself eyebrows and wrinkles, to alter the shape of his nose, to make his mouth larger, and to disguise his eyes. He learnt how to fasten on a varied assortment of beards, and he bought a complete stock of wigs. He ventured occasionally to leave the house in various disguises, and had no reason to be dissatisfied with himself. Little by little he gained confidence, and he ended by finding so much pleasure in these proceedings, after the style of Prince Rodolphe in the “Mysteries of Paris,” that nothing would have induced him to give up his plan.

In spite of all the time which this occupied, the viscount did not ostensibly change any of his habits, and above all did not fail to appear at the club every night. His tutor had put a room at his disposal. He went and dressed himself there, and, his excursions over, he went there to resume his ordinary clothes. At the end of two months his education was complete, and he set resolutely to work.

Monsieur de Pancorvo lived in a charming little house standing in its own grounds in the Rue Valois-du-Roule. Opposite the carriage-gates a wine-shop, the only one in this aristocratic street, served as a rendezvous for all the flunkies in the neighbourhood.

On Christmas-eve—a beautiful winter's day—a tall fellow who looked a groom in an aristocratic family, and who was no other than the viscount, presented himself at old Labriche's counter and ordered a glass of absinthe. Labriche, ex-valet to a marquis, had retained from his former profession a certain air of dignity which contrasted strangely with his present occupation. Added to this, thanks to the relations which he still kept up with great families, he had not his equal at finding employment for coachmen or cooks wanting places. Thus he exercised over his customers, almost exclusively composed of servants, unquestioned influence.

Servon had previously made inquiries about this individual, and he had every hope of utilising a man who knew all the inhabitants of this fashionable neighbourhood, masters and servants.

“Pretty cold, Monsieur Labriche,” said he, bowing politely to

the landlord, who of his counter had made a throne. "It's more comfortable here than on the box with the reins in your hands."

"That's true, my lad," replied the majestic publican, as he served his unknown customer with his absinthe; "but I don't think you are often seen in these parts, for I don't recognise you at all."

"Antoine, Monsieur Labriche, Antoine—from the Marquis de Vence's, who lived in the Rue de Berry, you know. I'm not surprised you've forgotten my face. Since the marquis's death I've been travelling with an American gentleman, and this is the first time I've set foot in the Faubourg for three years. I should like to come back to it very well, for these Americans, you see, are not the kind of people for a man like me, and if you knew of a place, Monsieur Labriche—"

"We'll see, my lad, we'll see. But, as far as Americans are concerned, you are quite right. Look, there's one lives in that house opposite; they say he's worth two or three millions, and he hasn't even a valet."

"Impossible!"

"It's as I say. He has a negro coachman that he brought from his land of savages, and a drunken Irishman who serves as his factotum."

"But they say he keeps six horses."

"That's true, that is; so he has in addition two grooms to look after them, and two funny grooms too! Two great bearded rascals that I shouldn't like to meet in a wood, and who talk some lingo that no one can understand. I know the colour of their money—"

"It's always like that."

"But I've never seen the colour of their talk."

"They're dumb perhaps, Monsieur Labriche."

"Didn't I say they talked some lingo?"

"Ah, that's true."

"They come here every evening and drink their bottle of brandy, and if you saw it, you would think with me that there's something under the surface. They come in, they pay in advance, drink each of them their half bottle and march off out of the street."

"Where do they go then, Monsieur Labriche?"

"Ah, that's what I've never been able to find out. But they lead a rum kind of life, for certain. Look here, two months ago one of them came home half dead; he didn't leave his stable for more than three weeks, and the other one treated him with remedies of his own. They wouldn't even have a doctor."

"What countrymen are they, Monsieur Labriche?"

"I know nothing about that, and he'd be a clever man who could say. But you're just in time, they're going out with the American lord's two chestnuts."

The pretended groom turned round quickly and looked into the street. True enough, two magnificent pure-bred Arab horses, led by two horrible-looking individuals, were just leaving Monsieur de

Pancorvo's gates. Wearing stable-jackets of an English cut, these singular grooms displayed beneath their checked caps two angular faces, skins tanned and bronzed, and bristling moustaches which reminded one vaguely of those of a tiger.

Their persons matched their costume. One would have taken them for two Calabrian brigands in livery.

"It's true they don't look up to much," said the pretended servant; "but never mind, all this puzzles me, just the same; I wouldn't mind entering the American's service myself. Eh, Monsieur Labriche, if you hear that he has decided to engage a valet, you might put in a word for me?"

"It might be managed my lad; I'll speak to the steward, Monsieur Paddy, as they call him, when he comes here for his grog, and if you'll call again one day this week——"

"I'll certainly call, and I hope that to-day you'll do me the pleasure to have a drink with me. I'm going to see a countryman of mine to-day, who lives at Ternes, and I've no time to stop. Your health, Monsieur Labriche."

"Thanks, Antoine; I'm at your service."

Monsieur Antoine paid his reckoning and walked out, after having shaken hands with the good publican.

That which Servon had learnt was not calculated to allay his suspicions. Monsieur de Pancorvo's grooms looked quite capable of plundering a passer-by, and for a man so rich and so fashionable not to have a single Frenchman in his service was at least remarkable.

The viscount did not wish to pursue his investigations further that day. He confined himself to walking round the house, and he noticed at an angle of the garden a small, low door which opened on to a deserted lane.

If this transatlantic gentleman was really a robber chief, this door had just the appearance of being used for his nightly sorties. Servon determined to watch this exit, and returned home more resolved than ever to dog Monsieur de Pancorvo's steps.

On the day after this first reconnaissance he was preparing to commence without delay some real investigations, when the strangest chance gave a fresh direction to his researches.

On that day, about six o'clock, the viscount was at the club and was intending to dine there. In order to make certain of obtaining a place at the large table it is necessary to write one's name beforehand on a register kept for that purpose. Servon, engaged in an interminable game of whist, and fearing that he should be forced to dine alone, rang for a footman and sent him to write his name in the book.

The game over, it occurred to him to go and look at the names of the other diners, intending to erase his name if he saw that of any bore. He was looking carelessly at the list, when he was suddenly struck with the peculiar character of the hand in which his name was written.

He recognised it immediately.

It was that of the letter containing the bank notes, which he had at that moment in his pocket and could compare at his leisure.

Doubt was impossible.

The Viscount de Servon's rescuer was a footman! — a footman at the club: the mystery became complicated.

On this discovery Servon felt vaguely that he was losing all trace. So he resolved to settle the question immediately. He called the mysterious servant and examined him with eager curiosity. He even stared in his face so long that the man betrayed some slight embarrassment; but in vain he scrutinised his face and person, nothing recalled him to his mind.

The man was of medium height, of a brownish complexion, with large black whiskers; exactly the appearance of a footman in an aristocratic family.

Servon said to him point-blank:

“It was you who wrote me this letter, then?”

And at the same moment he drew the envelope from his pocket and showed it to him. The servant looked at it an instant, and replied quite collectedly that the writing certainly did resemble his, but that he had not written it, and, endeavouring to be at once stupid and respectful, he added:

“Why should I have taken the liberty to write to Monsieur le Vicomte?”

Servon was tempted for an instant to continue his questions; but he saw the ridiculousness of his position, and cut them short with a gesture.

The man withdrew without adding a word.

Matters were getting more and more entangled. Servon went to the steward of the club, and pretending to be in want of a valet, said that he had noticed this one and inquired as to his antecedents.

“He is one of our best servants,” said the steward. “He is exact, honest, and zealous. His only fault is his mournful face, which the gentlemen don’t like. Monsieur de Pancorvo was complaining of it only yesterday; he says it brings him bad luck at cards.”

“How long has he been at the club?”

“Less than a year; he came with a very good character. He has almost always been in service with foreigners, and he speaks several languages.”

“How old is he?”

“I don’t know exactly, and I confess,” he added, “that I should be very sorry if you deprived us of him.”

Servon learnt, in addition, that this mysterious footman’s name was Loiseau, that he was not married, and that he lived alone in a small room close by. With all this information he was not much further advanced. However, he did not give in, and he managed to grasp a few salient facts in the midst of this chaos.

That the letter had been written by Monsieur Loiseau there was hardly any doubt. Only he might have written it for some one else. But it was evident that he knew the thief and his plans, and that both were in the club. Allowing that this thief was Pancorvo, it was necessary to discover some affinity, some bond of union between him and the footman, in order to explain their connection.

Upon this Servon was struck by certain coincidences. Both had entered the club about the same time ; both had lived for a long time abroad ; both spoke several languages.

It was possible that the footman had been placed there by some occult influence of Pancorvo, with an object easy to guess ; to give him information as to the habits of the members, their winnings, the money which they usually carried on them—all those things which servants know better than any one else. It remained still to be explained how the viscount had claims on the gratitude of one of these rascals, but he did not profess to be able to guess it at the first attempt.

The steward's information was correct. Monsieur Loiseau lived at No. 42 Rue de la Michodière, on the fifth floor.

A talkative portress informed Servon, with the inducement of a louis, that her lodger led a very regular life. He paid his rent regularly, never had any one to see him, and was hardly ever at home except to sleep, during the morning, after his night duty at the club.

The compassionate woman even went so far as to lament the hard lot of club servants, obliged to pass all their nights in this manner, for she said that poor Monsieur Loiseau never came in before daylight.

Provided with this information, Servon inquired at the club of the manner in which the servants' duties were organised, and he learnt that the footmen only passed one night out of three there. If Loiseau slept from home every night, it was doubtless because he spent his nights in some other manner. Decided as he was to leave no stone unturned in order to attain his object, there was but one course for the viscount to take : to track this footman as a hound tracks a stag.

Thanks to the lessons he had had from the actor, and to his first attempts in the neighbourhood of Pancorvo's house, he felt that he was clever enough to disguise himself well enough to escape recognition. He had even made himself tolerably accomplished in the art of following any one without being himself noticed.

Two days after, Servon, disguised as a market porter, was seated on a bench opposite the club. He was charmed with his disguise, which included a hat with a broad turned-down brim, very convenient for hiding his face, and a stick which at a pinch might have served as a defensive weapon. He was smoking a short pipe, duly coloured, and he had stuffed a table napkin under the neck of his coat so as to give himself a pair of high shoulders similar to those of porters. His most intimate friend would certainly not have recognised him.

He had already seen a number of men that he knew go into the club without having noticed him, and he felt quite confident of the success of his disguise. Twelve o'clock was striking, if twelve o'clock does strike on the boulevards, when Monsieur Loiseau made his appearance. He had taken off his livery and attired himself in his brown overcoat, which gave him the look of an inhabitant of the Marais. His whole appearance was that of an unpretending and honest man, so much so that the viscount was afraid for a moment that he had been mistaken ; but he had crossed the Rubicon, and he decided to see the thing out.

He allowed Monsieur Loiseau, then, to walk about twenty paces in front of him, which is the best distance to see without being seen, and began to follow him with the heavy step and clumsy gait which his character demanded. Servon was quite delighted at the talent with which he acted his part. But his joy was damped when he saw that the man, instead of proceeding towards the Faubourg Saint-Honoré, where he had hoped to see him enter Monsieur de Pancorvo's house, went in the exactly opposite direction.

As a matter of fact, Loiseau, leaving the boulevard, began to traverse the Chausée d'Antin. He walked at a measured pace, without hurrying himself and without looking at the passers-by. He had every appearance of a thoughtful man following his usual direction. Servon was still in hopes that he would turn down the Rue Saint-Lazare in order to gain the Faubourg Saint-Honoré, but he soon had to abandon this idea. Monsieur Loiseau turned into the Rue Blanche, travelled the whole length of the Rue Pigalle, and finally arrived at the barrier, which he crossed without hesitation.

Once on the outer boulevard, he turned to the right and soon entered a steep, narrow street which ran up the hill of Montmartre.

He had no idea that he was being followed.

With his head hanging, and bent as if beneath the weight of some grief or crime, the man walked on without looking round. He was evidently little troubled about being followed, or at least he had no suspicion that such was the case. All at once Servon lost sight of him. He had just disappeared at the top of some very steep steps with which the street ended ; but the viscount quickly ran up the worn stones of this species of ladder and caught sight of him again. This time Monsieur Loiseau had stopped before a garden gate. He was glancing uneasily around him, and held in his hand a key which he was preparing to introduce into the lock.

The viscount heard the sound of a closing door, and advanced cautiously.

He was in a street running parallel with the boulevard, and forming consequently a kind of ledge on the hill of Montmartre, unlike the other thoroughfares in this neighbourhood which almost all run up towards the top of the hill. This street, having a few houses on the left-hand side, was bounded on the right by a low wall, from which could be seen the large trees of a terraced garden. In the

middle of this wall a wooden gate served as an entrance, and Monsieur Loiseau had just gone through it.

Was he at home? Had he come here to commit a crime? Servon thought to himself that, after all, Loiseau had no occasion to go to Pancorvo's house for his orders, since the American came to the club every evening.

The night was too dark to see where this garden extended to; but Servon judged that it must belong to a house built almost on the top of the hill. A light which presently made its appearance over the top of the trees showed him that he was not mistaken. The footman had, then, a secret dwelling, and of a truth the place was well chosen for the accomplishment of some shady transaction.

It was mournful and mysterious.

Fully satisfied with this first discovery, Servon waited for about two hours, in order to lend a hand in case of crime; but the house remained dark, funereal, and silent.

He descended towards Paris, after having well noted the spot, went and changed his clothes, and was careful to put in an appearance at the club before going home.

III.

On the afternoon of the next day, without this time disguising himself, the viscount set out to explore. He knew that Loiseau had to be at his duties again at mid-day, and he was certain of not being disturbed in his observations.

He found the flight of steps and the deserted street again without difficulty, and recognised the garden gate where the man had disappeared. This half-rotten wooden gate seemed to hold together with difficulty. Through its crumbling bars was to be seen a kind of rock-work archway in the most horrible taste; but beyond this pretentious object there was nothing to be distinguished but an inextricable mass of climbers and shrubs, which gave the place the appearance of a Corsican *makis*.

An admirable scene for a murder.

From this thicket sprang tall trees, formerly no doubt forming avenues which had gradually disappeared in an undergrowth of brambles. Higher still than this virgin forest Servon saw, not without difficulty, a house as singular as the garden. It exactly resembled a tower, the Leaning Tower of Pisa even, for it was a good deal out of the perpendicular. This curious building, standing in the left-hand corner of the grounds, had a ground floor flush with the garden, a first storey which must have been gained by a terrace, and a second which almost looked over the tops of the trees.

Each storey was provided with one single window.

The house, built entirely of brick, seemed ready to fall to pieces,

less from age than from disuse. It was a young ruin, the ugliest object in the world.

The viscount wondered what ridiculous citizen had had the idea of erecting this sham obelisk in the midst of these old trees which would have so well accompanied a château in the eighteenth century style ; but he had not come there to engage in architectural studies, and he began to explore the place.

The flight of steps which had brought him to the gate continued to ascend on the right of the garden, from which it was separated by a very low wall. He mounted this difficult road and he found about half way up another wooden gate, as worm-eaten as the first, and which, moreover, seemed disused, for a vigorous nut-tree almost entirely hid it. He continued his ascent, and finally emerged in a small square space at the end of which he saw the old church of Montmartre.

At this point the wall of the garden turned suddenly to the left and entirely hid the house. A carriage-gate, in better condition than the others, stood in the middle of the wall. The iron chain which was hanging at the side was most probably attached to a bell, and indicated the official entrance to this strange abode. The little square was deserted, and Servon was able to examine and reflect at his ease.

He took note of the topography of this Castle of the Sleeping Beauty ; but he was not much further advanced, and he said to himself that boldness would pay him best. Being quite certain that Loiseau was not at home, he ventured to ring.

The sound of a cracked bell was heard, but no one answered. He tried again two or three times. A sepulchral silence reigned in the house.

But the din attracted to the door of a neighbouring house a dirty and horribly wrinkled old woman who said, in a trembling voice :

“ There’s no one there ! There’s no one there ! ”

Servon seized the opportunity, and asked whether Monsieur Loiseau did not live there.

“ I don’t know ; there’s no Loiseau, no Loiseau,” muttered the old witch, and she re-entered her hovel with the mechanical swiftness of a cuckoo in a Black Forest wooden clock.

All this had a weird effect.

Rather disconcerted, the viscount was about to walk away, when he espied, seated on a bench in the square, a respectable-looking man warming himself in the sun. He went quietly and sat down at his side, and began a conversation by a remark on the view, which was a magnificent one.

It just happened that Servon had fallen in with a kind of Joseph Prudhomme, who hastened to inform him that the air was much purer in Montmartre than in Paris, a fact of doubtful interest just at that moment. The young man listened to these stereotyped phrases until, by an adroit transition, he managed to inquire the

reason why the garden which lay at their feet remained thus deserted.

"Master," said this denizen of Montmartre, raising his voice, "I've lived here fifteen years, and I've always seen the place in the same state as you see it to-day. I've been told it belongs to a very rich foreigner who lives in the colonies. They do say that a terrible crime was committed there once, and that it is haunted at night ; but, like me, you are too sensible to believe such tales."

"Yes, certainly," interrupted Servon ; "but I thought the house was inhabited just now."

"It has been, sir, for the last six months, by the landlord's steward. He came from abroad last summer, but he doesn't show himself much."

"Do you know him ?"

"No. He's a man who passes all his days and even all his evenings in Paris."

"Does he visit no one ?"

"I don't think so. Would you believe, master, that he has never set foot in the Café des Acacias, where the best society of Montmartre meets ?"

"He's evidently not a man of taste," said Servon, smiling ; "but what do you think of his not seeing any of his neighbours ?"

"I don't think it's natural, and I'm inclined to think that the gentleman has something to do with the police."

"Ah ! really !"

Servon humoured the old simpleton for some little time, in the hope of getting something more definite out of him ; but the ancient inhabitant of Montmartre gave him no further information, for the very sufficient reason that he knew nothing.

The viscount returned home from his expedition a little more curious, but no wiser with regard to Monsieur Loiseau. One result, however, of this first inquiry was the knowledge that this doubtful individual led a mysterious existence, and that this mystery must have a cause ; but this cause was precisely the unknown quantity which he was anxious to discover.

The problem took more and more hold on Servon ; it was constantly on his mind, and he thought to himself that he should soon arrive at a solution of it, as Newton did of the law of gravitation—by always thinking of it. Frequenting the club more and more assiduously, with the sole object of keeping a watch on Monsieur de Pancorvo and Loiseau, he did not lose a gesture nor a movement of the two men whom he so watched. Monsieur de Pancorvo occasionally allowed a compromising remark to escape him, but Monsieur Loiseau was impenetrable. At any rate, if these two men knew one another they played their part well, for it was impossible to discover the slightest sign of intelligence between them. The footman always performed his duties with exemplary zeal, and Monsieur de Pancorvo continued to show himself to

be a fine player, which was all the easier in that he almost always won.

Since the attack of which the viscount had been the victim, no ill had befallen any of the players, at least in the street ; for, as a matter of fact, some one had ransacked the rooms of a good Angevin who had come to pass the winter in Paris, and who had been a heavy winner at cards. Having effected an entry by means of false keys whilst he was furiously gambling at the club, the thieves had forced open and emptied the desk where he kept his winnings, which at that time amounted to a considerable sum. The countryman complained loudly, and the affair created a great sensation which gave rise to all kinds of remarks.

Servon thought it best not to join in with the gossips who discussed the subject, but he learned for certain that on the night of the robbery Monsieur de Pancorvo was not at the club. To tell the truth, the viscount was the only one to remark the fact, for the noble foreigner had many friends, and passed for a perfect gentleman. Servon's brain was turning, like those of all men who are possessed of one fixed idea. He made every effort to drive out this persistent preoccupation ; but he only succeeded in arriving at a kind of compromise between the curiosity which was urging him on and his own natural good sense. Accordingly, he solemnly promised himself to think no more about it if, after one last attempt, he did not find a key to the mystery.

He had noticed that it would not be a matter of difficulty to introduce himself into the garden at Montmartre by the side door which opened on to the steps, and he imagined that, once inside, he would be certain to discover some means of observing the enemy at close quarters. So he resolved not to defer this decisive expedition, and he promised himself that it should be the last.

He chose the costume of a street lounger. He put on a dirty blouse, a tattered hat, and a wig of splendid curly hair. When the viscount was thus attired he admired himself, but a sad reflection forced itself upon him : a few rags and a blackguard's hat were sufficient to change the most fashionable man into the most arrant cut-throat. Servon chose a night when Loiseau was not on duty at the club, and he did not set out until after midnight, not having occasion to follow any track this time. On the contrary, it would be better to give the man time to settle himself in his strange abode, in order to observe him at his ease.

How ? The viscount knew not, as he wended his way towards Montmartre.

On this particular evening the weather seemed to have been expressly chosen for a gloomy enterprise.

One of those terrible hurricanes which come to us sometimes from the Atlantic was passing over Paris. Fearful gusts shook the houses, and a heavy rain beat upon the windows. The few belated foot-

passengers walked along with their bodies bent to the storm, and kept close to the houses, so as to avoid the tiles, which rattled down on all sides. Chimney-pots toppled down here and there with a terrible crash.

The night was an awe-inspiring one.

Servon wondered whether this cataclysm was a warning from heaven, and for an instant he thought of turning back ; but he said to himself that he was only in for an unwished-for bath after all ; that such a night would be certain to keep inquisitive people out of the way, and that the storm would favour his nocturnal enterprise. Accordingly, he continued bravely to ascend towards Montmartre, his elbows tucked in, and his head low—in spite of the torrents of rain which beat down from the north-west—like a ship running before the wind.

In the whole length of the Rue Pigalle he met not a soul, and he passed the barrier without seeing the custom-house clerks, carefully stowed away in their sentry-boxes. On the outer boulevard Servon had great difficulty in finding his way by the vacillating light of the street lamps, which the winds swayed to and fro on their rusty chains, and he kept plunging into quagmires which reminded him, at the gates of Paris, of the country roads of Brittany.

After an exhausting climb the viscount found himself, at about one o'clock in the morning, in front of the garden-gate, and a bright light which appeared over the tops of the trees caused him to think that he had arrived opportunely.

Without loss of time he commenced the escalade, and managed to grasp without much difficulty the branches of the nut-tree which grew against the door ; then, drawing himself up by his arms, he found himself after two attempts in the garden, without other damage than a large rent in his trousers.

But this was the easiest part of the undertaking.

He had to make his way into the middle of a veritable jungle, and approach the house without betraying his presence. Fortunately the roar of the storm, which swayed the branches of the great trees, drowned the sound of the branches which Servon broke as he walked along. He advanced stealthily, with his arms extended like a blind man, and scratching his hands in the brambles ; but a Breton used to hunting in the woods can afford to despise such trifling annoyances.

After a quarter of an hour of pioneer's work he gained a broad path, and saw on looking up that he was close beneath the house. The ground floor and first floor remained dark, but the single window of the second floor was lighted up.

Surprised at first that Loiseau had not closely fastened his shutters, Servon reflected that he must consider that this precaution was useless. And, in truth, the mysterious tower looked down from such a height upon all the low-lying houses that only the occupant of a balloon could have seen in at the windows.

Besides, the light might be a signal.

But the peculiar conformation of the place added much to the difficulty, and the viscount was in danger of having had his journey for nothing. He was racking his brain to think of an observatory, when the tall tree against which he ran in the darkness gave him an idea.

Servon, brought up in the country, had been a splendid hand at climbing for magpies' nests when a boy, and he felt that his hand had not lost its cunning. And, for the matter of that, he had no choice ; he must climb the tree or confess himself beaten. He made up his mind to sacrifice his trousers, and even his skin, which was little accustomed to the rough contact of the bark of an elm ; he grasped the trunk with the ardour of twenty.

The ascent was long and painful, and his hands were in a terrible state when he succeeded in seating himself pretty comfortably in the topmost fork of the tree. He bestrode a limb strong enough to have borne a rhinoceros, and at his back he had, as a kind of rest, the principal trunk of the elm. Fifteen yards at most separated the tree from the house, and Servon was perched a little higher than the window. He would see at last !

The spectacle which his eyes discovered on plunging into the room exceeded in strangeness his wildest dreams. The room was lighted by one lamp suspended from the ceiling, and its light fell strongly on the walls, which were completely hung with black. In the middle of this tomb-like place a man was on his knees, and apparently praying. In front of him rose an object which Servon had some difficulty in making out, and which he took at first for another man standing against the wall. He saw afterwards that it was a suit of armour. The crest of a strangely-shaped helmet gleamed in the light of the lamp ; the cuirass and thigh-pieces, less brightly lighted, seemed to be more tarnished, but it was certainly a suit of armour of the time of the Middle Ages before which Monsieur Loiseau was prostrated.

At this unexpected sight the viscount fell into a state of profound stupefaction. What form of worship could it be which this singular individual was observing in the heart of Paris ? Was he praying to a fetish, like the negroes of the African coast ?

Servon wondered in vain. He could find no explanation. He was confounded, stunned. There was certainly one explanation, if he could admit to himself that Loiseau had gone mad ; but that perfect servant had never betrayed the least symptom of mental aberration.

It was marvellous.

Lost in amazement, the viscount was staring his hardest at this worshipper of armour, when his attention was attracted in another direction. In spite of the gusts which furiously lashed the tree in which he was seated, Servon fancied he distinguished the sound of a door turning on its rusty hinges. The noise came from below,

from the direction of the street which ran along at the bottom of the garden. Soon all doubt was impossible. Two men were mounting the slope, walking with slow and measured tread. Servon, certain of being unseen, peered downwards ; but the night was so dark that he only distinguished two forms moving towards the house. His excitement was so great that he held his breath, as if the strangers could have heard him. The new-comers passed by so closely that they disappeared in the shadow thrown by the tower, and the viscount lost sight of them ; but almost immediately he heard the sharp, sonorous sound of three blows on the door of the ground-floor.

The effect of this appeal was instantaneous.

The shutters on the second floor were closed, and the light disappeared.

“Who’s there ?” asked a hardly audible voice from within. One of the visitors replied, and Servon heard some name with an English termination ; such as Parker or Palmer.

The viscount learnt nothing from this name, but he certainly fancied that the voice was not unknown to him.

His uncertainty was not of long duration.

The door opened ; a man appeared, and the light which he held in his hand falling upon the stranger’s face, lighted up the features of—Monsieur de Pancorvo. The viscount had not been mistaken, then : the footman and the foreign nobleman were acquainted. All his conjectures were justified, and he felt proud of his persevering perspicacity. Christopher Columbus must have experienced some such feeling when he discovered the shores of America.

The two visitors entered, and the door closed behind them.

The curtain had fallen at the most interesting point of the play, for the door of the ground floor was secured by thick bolts which only allowed a faint gleam of light to escape, and there was nothing more for Servon to see from his post of observation. As soon as he had made certain that the confabulation was about to take place out of sight, he determined to descend, and the more gladly that his lofty perch began to be very uncomfortable.

As soon as he reached the ground his first thought was to stand against the house and endeavour to overhear the conversation ; but—and this proves once more the omnipotence of an idea on the human mind—this act of listening at doors was repugnant to him. For hours, and even for days past, Servon had been doing nothing else, but the form in which it was done prevented the sacrifice of a principle. Upon this occasion he was seized with such scruples that he decided to beat a retreat.

And, as a matter of fact, he had seen quite enough. Monsieur de Pancorvo was on an intimate footing with a servant. The proof of this relationship was sufficient to put Servon on his guard against these two rogues, for he now regarded them as such. As for

taking upon himself the task of ridding the world of them, it was one which did not suit him in the least.

These short reflections over, he walked towards the gate and arrived there without mishap, but his final climb was not a happy one. His foot slipped when on the top of the wall, and he fell heavily on the first step.

The worst part of this fall was, that the poor viscount hurt himself very much. Close to the gate was an iron scraper, intended to clean the boots of visitors, a wise precaution in that muddy neighbourhood. His head struck against this iron blade, which was still very sharp, although very rusty, and inflicted a deep cut on his forehead. When Servon rose, quite stunned by the blow, he was bleeding copiously, and the prospect of remaining scarred for ever caused him to feel anything but cheerful. A hundred times he cursed the stupid curiosity which had brought him to this den, and, quite confused and sore, he took his way back to Paris.

The storm had abated a little ; but the night was still dark and rainy, and Servon very luckily met no one. Tattered and bleeding as he was, the first policeman would certainly have taken him off to the station. The viscount reached his friend's house unperceived, and threw off his muddy and blood-stained rags. He made haste to put on the outward semblance of a respectable man.

An hour afterwards Servon was at home, in front of a good fire, bathing his forehead and swearing, a little late in the day, that he would not be caught again doing the work of the police.

IV

THE viscount passed the next day at his fireside and only went out in the evening to go to the club, with the intention of not remaining there long, and of going to bed early, for he felt worn out. Moreover, the ridiculous gash in his forehead was still quite fresh, and forced him, in order to avoid awkward questions, to keep his hat on ; an act of rudeness, however, which could shock no one, for it is very general in all clubs. It is an English importation.

It was nine o'clock ; the club was almost deserted. Servon found neither Monsieur de Pancorvo, which was not extraordinary, as the theatres were open, nor Monsieur Loiseau, who ought, however, to have been there. The scenes of the night before had intensely excited the viscount's curiosity, and in spite of all the vows which he had made to himself he was very nearly going to the steward and telling him of the strange nocturnal occupations of his subordinate. A club footman who spends his nights in worshipping suits of armour in rooms hung with black is a rather too eccentric idea, and eccentricity is only allowable in gentlemen. But Servon reflected that it would be the height of bad form to concern himself about

the acts of a servant. Besides, he had determined to dismiss all thoughts of this stupid affair, and, after mature reflection, he left to Providence the task of punishing vice and rewarding virtue, and went home to bed.

The next morning, about nine o'clock, he was enjoying that morning doze which is the most charming of all slumber, with all due deference to those who love to see the sun rise, and was in a state between sleeping and waking. Under these conditions one does not pay much attention to any sound. The bell in his room, which was ringing vigorously, appeared to him like distant music, and he turned over with his face to the wall. But the tinkling sound was renewed, and finally became so distinct that the viscount was thoroughly roused. After having heartily cursed his servant, who had taken it into his head to be away at such a time, he rose and decided to go and see what cause could have prompted this early peal. Servon opened his door in a very bad humour, and found himself face to face with a gentleman who was quite unknown to him. Was he a gentleman?

Not exactly, although he was pretty well dressed. There was nothing particularly remarkable about his face. The squareness of his figure and the shape of his shoulders betrayed an old soldier; but, as a matter of fact, he might equally well have been an insurance agent or a sheriff's clerk. The individual most politely raised his hat, inquired whether it was really to the Viscount Henri de Servon that he had the honour of speaking, and said, in a soft and insinuating voice: "Monsieur Charles de Précey begs that Monsieur Henri de Servon will be good enough to call upon him this morning as soon as possible."

"Very well," replied the viscount, drily; "I will be there in an hour's time."

Upon this the man made a movement to enter, as if he proposed to await Servon inside; but as the latter began to close the door he did not insist, took off his hat again, and departed.

Very little pleased at the prospect of going out so early, the viscount wondered as he dressed himself whatever that confounded Précey could want with him at an hour when, as a rule, he was fast asleep. Servon finally concluded that his friend, having become involved in some quarrel, wanted his assistance, and he thought that, amongst all the inconveniences of a duel, one of the most disagreeable is that one which forces people to leave their beds at unearthly hours. However, he finished his toilette and started off towards his friend's house. After he had gone a few steps and had arrived in the Allée des Veuves, where he had once been so nearly strangled, the viscount saw that it was going to rain, and as Précey lived some distance off he determined to take a cab.

He had already hailed a driver, when he heard his name pronounced in a low tone. Turning round, Servon found himself face to face with the individual who had rung so loudly at his bell. The

man bowed more politely than ever, and said with a most engaging manner :

"Excuse me, Monsieur le Vicomte, I can save you a fruitless journey. Monsieur de Précey is not awaiting you at his house, but at the police commissary's, who lives close to here."

At this unexpected remark poor Servon's stupefaction was complete, and his astonishment soon gave way to a fit of anger. He felt much inclined to send flying into the gutter this complacent gentleman who was so anxious to spare him a useless journey ; but he reflected that this would have been ridiculous, and succeeded in regaining his self-possession.

"What stupid joke is this ?" said he, taking a very high tone.

"It is not one at all, I assure you, Monsieur le Vicomte," replied the stranger, "and your presence at the commissary's is indispensable."

On second thoughts Servon reflected that Précey might have got into some trouble and required to be identified ; so he said more quietly : "Very good ; I am ready ; take me there."

The stranger made a low bow and began to walk, not in front of Servon, but on his left, without, however, permitting himself to approach too closely. The journey was not long, and after a few minutes' walk Servon ascended a narrow flight of steps, and on the first floor of a building the word "Office," written in large letters on a yellow door, informed him that he had arrived at his destination.

This time his conductor was careful to walk behind him. The viscount opened the door and walked in. He was at once struck by the desolate look of the place. It was certainly an office, since there were tables, desks, and even three clerks who were writing in a corner ; but it smacked of the prison, the pawn-shop, or the hospital. He inquired of one of the clerks what he was wanted for. The latter, after having glanced at him in a way which the viscount was quite unaccustomed to, replied :

"Sit down and wait."

The tone in which this was said gave Servon food for reflection. The idea had not yet struck him that it was for some reason affecting himself personally that he had been brought on this unexpected visit to a functionary whom one does not ordinarily come to see for pleasure. But he had noticed that his guide had taken a seat on a form, beside a policeman, and that this polite man looked like a detective. Servon had not time for much thought, for a door opened and he saw a person make his appearance about whose profession there could be no mistake. The commissary, for it was he, bowed to him, begged him to be good enough to step into his private room, and there, after having seated himself at a desk of an unmistakably official stamp, he pointed to an arm-chair.

An embarrassing silence succeeded this almost solemn entrance. The magistrate turned over a bundle of papers and took some notes.

The viscount, beyond measure surprised, waited for him to ask

him some questions. Suddenly his eyes fell on an open newspaper, the first page of which was lying in front of him on a corner of the desk.

It was the Police Gazette.

At the top of the first column the following words appeared in large letters :

THE MONTMARTRE CRIME !

Vaguely interested in this sensational title, the viscount began to read an article which commenced as follows :

“ Whilst the storm of last night was raging over Paris a terrible and mysterious drama was being enacted at Montmartre.

“ At the top of the hill, and quite close to the parish church, a house which for long past has been uninhabited was the scene of a crime, of which at present neither the cause nor the details are known.”

At this passage Servon, who was reading mechanically, and chiefly in order to keep himself in countenance, started ; then suddenly, by an impulse which he could not control, he took up the paper and read eagerly :

“ For about the last six months,” continued the article, “ this house has had for its sole occupant a man whose habits were most singular. He received no visitors, came home very late, and went out before daybreak. This morning a woman who lives close by, astonished at seeing a door on the terrace open which the tenant had always carefully kept shut, had the curiosity to enter it, and saw at the entrance traces of blood which continued as far as the garden. Very much alarmed, she went and informed the police commissary, who at once visited the spot, and saw that a terrible crime had just been committed.”

When the commissary saw Henri de Servon absorbed in the perusal of the paper, which had evidently been left there on purpose, he left off writing and looked at the young man, endeavouring to read in his face the sensations which he was experiencing. The viscount, not imagining that he was being watched, continued to read.

“ In a room situated on the second floor a corpse was lying in a pool of blood. It was that of a well-dressed man, still young and very strongly built. He appeared only to have succumbed after a desperate struggle, for he was covered with wounds. The last one, which had reached the heart, must have caused death. It was not possible, on the first examination, to determine what was the deadly instrument. Weapons of various kinds were strewed here and there on the floor ; others were still hanging on the walls of the room, which had a most strange appearance. Entirely hung with black, it had the appearance of a mortuary chapel, and—a fact which would make it appear that it had been inhabited by a madman—a skeleton was found there wearing a brass helmet and a buff suit of armour of the time of Louis XIII. As for the mysterious tenant, he had dis-

appeared, and everything points to him as having been the murderer, although certain circumstances would make it appear that he had had several accomplices. Traces of blood discovered on the terrace prove that the victim, in defending himself, had wounded his assassins, and this circumstance will no doubt help to lead to their discovery. A large crowd has been collected about the house all day.

“ LATER.

“ We learn, at the moment of going to press, that the victim has just been identified. He is a rich foreigner, Monsieur de P., who recently arrived in Paris. It is believed that he was enticed into a trap, and certain indications would seem to connect his murder with the nocturnal attacks which have lately become so frequent. It is even said that a providential chance has put the police on the track of one of the assassins. We shall keep our readers informed of the progress of this case, which bids fair to rank among the most sensational ones of our day.”

In proportion as he continued reading, Servon's surprise gave way to the most intense interest, and when he arrived at the end of the article he was so absorbed that he had completely forgotten where he was seated. On raising his head, his eyes met those of the commissary, who was noting on his face the traces of the violent impressions which were passing in his mind. The unfortunate viscount grew pale under this clear and searching look which seemed to penetrate his soul ; he started, in spite of himself, when the magistrate, without taking his eyes off him, opened a drawer of his desk, took from it some object, handed it to him, and said :

“ Does this belong to you, sir ? ”

It was a small Russian leather case containing visiting cards.

“ Yes, certainly,” stammered Servon ; “ the pocket-book is mine ; I did not know I had lost it.” An icy silence followed this reply, which the poor viscount had some difficulty in uttering distinctly. He seemed to feel weighing on him the penetrating look of his formidable questioner, and he experienced the vague sensation of a yet unknown danger. However, he regained to a certain extent his self-possession, and continued with the most careless air that he could assume : “ I do not suppose, sir, that it was to restore to me an article of such trifling value that you sent one of your men to summon me just now.”

“ Certainly not,” replied the commissary, without taking his eyes off him. And he added, measuring his sentences and emphasising each word :

“ The pocket-book was found yesterday morning at the door of a garden—of a garden belonging to a house at Montmartre. On the door where it was picked up there was blood. And, look, there are a few drops on the pocket-book.” And he pointed with his finger to some small dark spots on the cover.

In Victor Hugo's "Les Misérables" there is a superb chapter entitled, "A storm in a brain."

And in truth something very like a storm was raging in Servon's brain at that moment. It seemed to him that all his ideas were becoming confused, and yet he grasped with incredible clearness all the events which had succeeded one another during the last forty-eight hours. He perceived all at once their terrible consequences, somewhat like a man who, in the midst of a quiet walk, sees suddenly a precipice yawning at his feet.

The unhappy viscount's face became livid, and he had great difficulty in articulating two or three disjointed words.

"I don't know ; I can't think where I lost this pocket-book."

The commissary did not cease to look at him as he played this sorry part, and Servon read unmistakeable scorn in his eyes.

He must have thought : "Here is a cowardly villain."

"The victim of the odious crime committed last night at Montmartre," continued the commissary slowly, "was Monsieur de Pancorvo, one of your friends."

Servon made a sign of dissent.

"An acquaintance, at least. He was very rich, and it is supposed that he was drawn into an ambuscade to be robbed and murdered. You recognised, as belonging to yourself, this pocket-book, which must have been dropped by one of the murderers, or at least by one of the witnesses of the murder."

The viscount would have replied, but his voice failed him ; his emotion overcame him.

"It is possible," continued the commissary, "that circumstances as yet unknown to justice may have led you to his house at the moment when a crime was being committed ; but in that case you must frankly explain them. In your own interests I call upon you to speak straightforwardly and without reserve."

This last request was made in a more gentle tone. It gave Servon a chance of confessing, which would certainly have been his wisest course. Unfortunately, he was far from seeing in it a kindly intention ; he suspected a trap. Passion took away from him much of his customary good sense, and he could not control his first impulse.

"Sir," said he, rising abruptly, "I have no reply to make to a charge which my past life and my position in the world might have protected me from. If my pocket-book was present at a crime, I was not there, and it is no part of my duty to explain to you the death of a man whom I knew but slightly. But I would have you remark that for a man to engage in murder and robbery he must be in great need of money, and that I have an independent fortune."

This disdainful justification appeared to make very little impression on the commissary, who contented himself with saying, with an indifference which was evidently forced :

"You have been recently wounded ; your forehead shows the mark of a sword-cut."

As a matter of fact, the deep gash which Servon had made when he fell at the door of the garden had hardly closed, and marked his skin like a long red wale.

This supposed proof, of which he understood all the danger, completed the viscount's exasperation.

"And what is that to you?" he replied, gesticulating.

"It is singular," continued the commissary, unmoved, "your hands are scratched, too." And in truth there were to be seen on them the very apparent marks left by the thorns in the garden. "One would say the marks of finger-nails. Now, sir, compose yourself, sit down, and listen to me."

Servon obeyed, without quite knowing what he did.

"In the first place," continued the magistrate, after having collected his thoughts for a moment, "believe me that your position and your irreproachable antecedents are perfectly well known to me. The manner in which I have acted should prove this to you. This pocket-book has been in my hands since yesterday; it is filled with visiting cards bearing your name, and if I had had to deal with a less honourable man, I should simply have had you arrested at your club, or in the street, for a detective was following you all the evening. I wished to spare you a public scandal, and I proceeded thus, because I thought that you would be able to clear yourself. I repeat, then, will you be good enough, instead of taking refuge behind untenable denials, to give me a sincere and complete explanation. I do not refuse to believe in your innocence, in spite of the fresh indication which I have just seen."

His eyes went from the viscount's forehead to his hands.

"You may possibly have acted in self-defence. Perhaps even you narrowly escaped perishing with Monsieur de Pancorvo. I am prepared to admit all and any excuses, but it is necessary first for you to make them."

This language, of which Servon saw the stern logic, threw him into a state of the greatest perplexity. He could not make up his mind to tell a lie, and, on the other hand, the idea of relating his ridiculous freaks was unbearable. Besides, he began to ask himself whether his strange story would be credited, and he resolved only to refer to it at the last extremity. He had gradually regained his self-possession, and it was with the object of seeing how the land lay, that he replied: "Supposing, sir, that a perfectly laudable motive had led me to this house at Montmartre, and that it suits me to inform you of it, may I feel certain that that knowledge will rest with you alone, and that the extent of your powers will permit you not to pursue the affair any further?"

The poor viscount quickly saw his mistake. He had offended a man whom he ought to have taken the greatest pains to humour.

"I see, sir," said the magistrate, with marked coolness, "that you have no idea of my functions. I will explain them to you in

three words—they are unlimited, with the proviso that I furnish an account of them."

"And if I persisted in my silence?"

"In that case my duty would force me to hand you over to justice."

"In other words——"

"That I should draw up a report of this examination, and that I should intimate in it your refusal to reply, after which my mission would be fulfilled, and that of the magistrate would commence."

"Very good, sir; I can withdraw, then."

At these words the most profound astonishment was depicted on the commissary's face; but he had the good taste not to smile, and contented himself with replying: "You have misunderstood me, sir. In the absence of any explanation on your part, the charge against you is sufficiently serious for you to be kept under arrest, and I shall be obliged to send you to prison."

This sentence fell on the unfortunate Servon like a cold shower-bath. He must make up his mind now to look things in the face. He was arrested—arrested like the lowest gaol-bird, with whom he would no doubt be lodged. But this dreadful word *prison*, which almost always terrifies the guilty, had quite an opposite effect on the viscount. Deadly pale, his fists clenched and his teeth set, he said, smiling bitterly:

"Very well, that will finish it. I am ready to go wherever you like to send me." To his great surprise his insolent tone did not in the least irritate the commissary. Servon even thought that he saw doubt in his eyes. Perhaps he was thinking that a man whose conscience accuses him of murder hardly indulges in such fits of passion.

But this idea, if indeed it had occurred to him, did not prevent him from calling his clerk, dictating to him the depositions—which the viscount furiously refused to sign—and calling a cab.

The sound of wheels was heard in the court-yard. Two detectives appeared at the door of the room.

"Here is the warrant," said the commissary to them; "take this gentleman to gaol."

V

HALF-AN-HOUR after this scene Henri de Servon was locked up in La Force, which at that time served as the prison for those arrested on suspicion. The cell in which he had been placed was a narrow room, whose walls offered to the eye a smooth, shining surface only. The window—that is to say, a glass wicket, faced the door. The cell was four yards in length and two in breadth. On the left was a bed, on the right a table fastened to the wall, and a stool set into the floor. All was clean and cool. Nothing gloomy, nothing dark,

nothing which smacked of the prison. The door alone looked like a prison door.

But it was easy to see that this simple room took better care of its inmates than the smoky old walls of the bastilles of old. Latude would have renounced the idea of escape at the sight of these walls of polished stucco, upon which the mark of a thumb-nail would have been distinguished. It was plain and sure, as the law is in these days.

After having admired this production of a state of civilisation advanced enough to make even its prisons refined, the viscount sat down and began to reflect. His anger had disappeared, and he was able to survey his position with more coolness. It was a singularly disagreeable one, and might become very serious. But on seeing himself plainly accused of theft and murder, Servon at last perceived that it was time to make a confession of his folly.

"A magistrate," said he, "is by profession acute, and when the one who is to examine me knows the reason of my presence in that cursed garden he will set me at liberty, and will keep my secret. I shall have been out of the way for such a short time, and I was arrested with so much delicacy and precaution, that no one will have a suspicion of this little journey in regions but little known to the society in which I live."

Yet the viscount had still one serious scruple.

In order to clear himself he would necessarily be forced to relate his ridiculous chase after a footman, and eventually to inform the police that this footman was the Montmartre murderer. The consequence of this confession might be to send to the scaffold a man who, as far as the viscount could make out, had saved his life in the Champs-Elysées.

But he had no alternative ; he was in hopes, though, that Loiseau had taken his precautions before despatching his friend, or accomplice, Pancorvo, to the next world, and that he would never be captured. These thoughts calmed him to a great extent, and in order to complete his consolation, he said to himself that he would certainly be examined next day, and that four-and-twenty hours are soon over, after all. But Henri suddenly became aware that he was hungry, and he was wondering to what sort of black broth he would be condemned, when a wicket in the door of the cell opened most opportunely, and Servon saw the face of a messenger who was ready to bring him anything he might desire, by paying for it, be it understood. A quarter of an hour afterwards the brilliant viscount was devouring a beefsteak which was not much worse than those one gets in a fashionable restaurant. The utensils were the worst part of the meal, and the tin mug which served as a glass disgusted Servon so much that he preferred to drink from the mouth of the bottle. His cigar-case was luckily full, and he smoked uninterruptedly until the time when, by dint of turning over in his head the events of the day and his prospects for the morrow, he began to feel sleepy.

The poor viscount went bravely to bed at a time when he was accustomed to dress for dinner. His bed was not particularly hard, and he was certain that the clothes were clean, for they had been put on in his presence. He went quickly off to sleep, thinking of the pleasure in finding himself at home next night, and it was broad daylight when he awoke, much refreshed, and quite ready to go and breakfast at the *Café de Paris*.

The absence of any toilette necessaries reminded him of the painful reality. He had at his disposal a pitcher full of water and an earthenware basin. He had to make the best of things, but this detail of prison life settled him. The viscount would have confessed to anything if he could have had his own washing utensils.

One point still gave him anxiety: would he be kept waiting long before being examined? The morning seemed to him to pass terribly slowly, for it was near mid-day when the door of his cell opened. A warder had come to inform him that the magistrate awaited him.

At last!

A close conveyance was stationed in the prison-yard; the viscount entered it in company with two policemen, and half-an-hour afterwards he alighted at one of the side doors of the *Palais de Justice*. The viscount had had time to reflect on the decisive ordeal to which he was about to submit, and he felt perfectly calm.

One of the policemen knocked gently, opened the door without waiting, and motioned to him to enter. He obeyed, and found himself in a square room hung with green paper, and lighted by a large, high window. The sunlight flooded this formidable room, and gave it a cheerful look which surprised Servon. Seated at a table covered with papers was a man with a fat, composed face; he was dressed in black and wore a white tie.

He was writing, and hardly lifted his eyes.

The viscount would have taken him for the magistrate, if he had not perceived on his right, at the far end of the room, and slightly in the shade, another person who was standing, and who had observed him narrowly ever since he entered the room.

This latter was certainly the magistrate who was about to decide on his life and his honour. If Servon had had any doubt, the gesture with which he pointed to a chair—placed there like a stool of repentance—would have informed him of the fact.

The other man was only his clerk.

The magistrate seated himself at his desk, and turned over a bundle of papers for a few minutes. The viscount fancied that he was stealthily looking at him. For an instant their glances met like two swords. Servon found him younger than he had expected, and he drew a favourable augury from his intelligent face, and from his manners, which were those of a gentleman. To the great surprise of the prisoner, who began to feel more and more at ease, his examination began by inquiries as to his name, age, and abode, and

was followed by insignificant questions as to the position of his family and his fortune. Servon replied to them with a sincerity mingled with a rather too marked indifference. He expected a direct attack, which did not come, and he lost patience altogether when the magistrate asked him simply whether he had anything further to add to the examination which he had already undergone before the police commissary.

"A good deal," said the viscount, with more warmth than was necessary, "and I am anxious, sir, to put an end to a misunderstanding which has already lasted too long."

"I am listening," said the magistrate, who had raised his head at the word misunderstanding, "and I am quite ready to hear and accept your explanations as to the crime of which you stand accused."

He emphasised the last words, and made a sign to the clerk to hold himself in readiness. His tone of voice and his gesture gave the viscount clear warning not to forget his difficult position. Servon took the hint, and began in a voice which he endeavoured to render calm the long account of his duels and exploits in this sad business. He started from the beginning by relating the nocturnal attack of which he had been the victim, his rescue by a stranger, and the curious restoration of his money the next day. The magistrate listened with intelligent attention, at the same time taking notes. During the first part of the recital he refrained from interrupting, and if this silence had been premeditated, in order to disconcert the prisoner, it was crowned with success.

Servon expected some questions, and he was condemned to a continuous monologue. The sound of the clerk's scratchy pen running at a furious rate over the paper was the sole accompaniment to his narration.

As often happens under similar circumstances, he ended by listening to himself, which is the surest method of losing the thread of one's ideas. Fortunately, at the moment when the viscount felt that he was getting into a complete muddle, a sign from the magistrate stopped him. It seemed to poor Servon that he had just touched land after a long swim.

"So," said the magistrate, "you received from a stranger the sum of sixty-five thousand francs?"

"Yes, sir, and I have just had the honour to explain to you under what circumstances."

"What use did you make of the money?"

"Why," said Servon, after hesitating slightly, "the use which I ordinarily make of any money, and I confess that this use is not always quite commendable. But, as a matter of fact, I have spent very little lately, and a large portion of the sum is at my house still."

"This statement will be verified," continued the judge; "but at any rate you used some of this money—"

"Which was my own, returned to me, and to which I still think I had a perfect right."

"Are you quite certain of that? You ought to have had doubts on the subject, and most probably you did have."

"But, sir——"

"In such a case, so it seems to me, a man of your position and education should have been on his guard. That was, in fact, the least part of your duty, for you should have informed the police of such strange events. But let that pass, and continue."

The viscount had thought himself armed at all points, and he felt that his adversary's first pass had gone home. One aspect of his position appeared to him now in quite a different light, and he began to think to himself that his obstinate silence would very possibly turn out to be anything but in his favour. Thus he had lost a great part of his assurance when the time came to relate how he had recognised, in the footman Loiseau, the author of the anonymous missive. It was with marked embarrassment that he commenced the story of his disguises and voyages of discovery after this mysterious individual.

During this long account the magistrate only interrupted the viscount to ask him the name and address of the actor at whose house he put on his disguises. On the other hand, he never ceased taking notes. Servon was very much relieved on arriving at the conclusion of his story—that is to say, at the ridiculous fall which had terminated it.

The magistrate remarked, without showing any trace of what was passing in his mind :

"The identity of the occupant of the house at Montmartre has been established, and the man is, in fact, the servant who was called, or had himself called, Loiseau."

"Well——"

"In this particular you have spoken the truth."

The words "in this particular" caused the viscount to give a start which was not unnoticed.

"But if, as you suppose, and as appearances would seem to indicate, this pretended footman is only a professional criminal, how can you have formerly done him a service?"

"I have already explained to you that I do not know."

"It is strange, to say the least of it, that relations can ever have existed between you and a wretch of that description, and I cannot conceal from you the fact that as long as justice is not enlightened upon this point it will admit your explanation with difficulty."

"Justice, by explaining this fact, would render me a signal service."

"Your statements," said the judge, after a pause, "will be inquired into with all care, and all the promptitude which the gravity of this affair and your own position demand. Be good enough, then, to complete, if you have anything further to add, this simple

examination which, as you will no doubt see, can be only very summary."

This simple remark, so clear and so natural, had on Servon the effect of a thunderbolt. He had a thousand things to say ; he could not say one. He was literally dumbfounded.

"So," said the unfortunate man to himself, "the truth has not been able to show itself from amidst the close array of facts which condemn me ; the most open confession has not even been able to disturb in the slightest degree the magistrate's convictions. He thinks I am guilty, and it is solely because of the class of society to which I belong that he still affects a show of amiability. Not only has my story not convinced him of my innocence, but it has rendered me despicable, for it would appear that I had betrayed an accomplice. I was already bad enough. That crowns all."

Servon's mournful reflections were interrupted by the insinuating voice of the clerk, who asked him to sign his depositions. This was the signal for a lively reaction. The viscount had been born with a very distinct idea of what was just and unjust. As long as he had only had before him the prospect of the discomfort of arrest, and its passing consequences, he had concluded that he had no right to complain, and that he should submit to the just punishment of his imprudent curiosity. He had plotted to watch people at random, by disguising himself like the Caliph of Bagdad, and his stupid freak had had the effect of lodging him in prison.

That was only to be expected.

But to remain seriously under the charge of a horrible accusation, to receive from the outset marks of scorn from his equals, that was more than Servon deserved, and this thought gave him energy. He drew himself up, rose from his seat, and, with head erect and firm glance, he awaited the conclusion of this terrible interview.

"Sir," said the magistrate, slightly emphasising the word, as if to show his intention of treating the viscount with a certain amount of consideration, "the necessities of an investigation which may last some time compel me, as you must understand, to keep you under arrest. I shall do all in my power to accelerate the progress of this wretched affair. That is the only favour which I can promise you at present."

"It is the only one that I claim," said Servon, with an apparent calm which he was certainly far from feeling,

He bowed to the magistrate, who coldly returned it, and left the room with head erect.

Servon's stiffness soon forsook him. The door of the formidable room where he had just left his last illusions had hardly closed behind him than his position appeared to him in all its horrors. The unfortunate man, who just before had borne himself so bravely in the presence of the magistrate, like a gladiator who wishes to die gracefully, gave way now beneath the weight of his misfortune, and

followed, crestfallen, the two detectives told off to guide him through the tortuous passages of the Palais.

During the time that the viscount had been undergoing his examination, the sombre corridors, which serve as ante-rooms to justice, had become peopled with strange figures.

All sorts and conditions of men and women, come there no doubt as witnesses, were sitting on the benches, and it was no slight aggravation of poor Servon's torture to have to submit to all these inquisitive glances. He seemed even to recognise some few of them, amongst others the portress of the Rue de la Michodière, who had formerly given him information as to Monsieur Loiseau's movements. Hastening his steps, he arrived at a narrow passage where people were going to and fro. At a dark turning the viscount passed a man who looked like a sheriff's clerk, wearing blue spectacles and carrying a large bundle of papers under his arm, and there was so little room that he brushed against him as he passed. The man of law was hurrying along, and he had already disappeared when Servon found that something had been slipped into his hand. It was round and hard, and for a moment the viscount thought that some one had played him a practical joke ; but instinct, which prisoners soon acquire, prompted him to hide the object. This was easy enough, as the detectives had noticed nothing. Servon could not make out the meaning of it ; but he suspected some unlooked-for succour, and he was anxious to be alone in order to satisfy himself.

Hardly had he re-entered his cell than he set to work to examine the mysterious missive ; but he bethought himself that he might be watched through some invisible hole, and he took his precautions accordingly.

He began by walking about with an indifferent air, then he laid himself down on his bed, as if he would have slept.

In this cleverly-contrived position he thought he should be able, without being seen, to gently move towards his face the hand which had so opportunely served as a letter-box. He quietly unfolded a ball of paper about the size of a pea, and saw before his eyes a note in a handwriting which he at once recognised.

They were the same rather large and crooked letters in which the note containing the bank-notes had been written ; it was Monsieur Loiseau's writing. The viscount eagerly read these three sentences : "Before the end of the week you will be free. Do not reply if you are examined. Destroy this note."

Servon learnt nothing from these all too laconic instructions, except that the individual who was so strangely connected with his existence was still continuing his singular protection. The note reassured him, however, upon one point. It was plain to him that he had not to deal with an ordinary criminal, for a common assassin would have employed his time in making tracks, instead of amusing himself by playing the part of Providence.

But how would this invisible protector establish Servon's innocence, when the most perfect sincerity on his part had not been able to do so? This was what he found it impossible to conjecture. He thought over the extraordinary adventures in which he had been engaged during the last two months, and only succeeded in still further confusing his already puzzled brain.

In the midst of so many different ideas one piece of advice struck him: that of being silent. Possibly he had already said too much, but he resolved that not another word should be extracted from him. Then he began to think that liberty would come too late, if it ever came at all, for his arrest must be already known, and he gave himself up to a fit of despair. For the first time in his life Servon found himself in one of those impossible positions which have been found so much fault with in novels, and he felt he had neither the strength nor the cunning to extricate himself from it. That day he recognised the fact that he was not born to be a conspirator.

How long would he pass in this tomb?

"Before the end of the week you will be free." These words were constantly on his mind, and he began to count the days. It was Monday; the prediction could not take long to accomplish. Three days passed. No news from the outside world had penetrated to the prisoner. He had written to no one, and no one had asked to see him. The magistrate himself seemed to have forgotten him, for he had not summoned him to a fresh examination. On the Thursday evening a warden entered and handed to the viscount a large parcel of linen and toilette necessaries. It was evidently Charles de Précey who had thus thought of him, and Servon thought to himself that if his friend knew of his misfortune, his arrest must at that moment be the news of all the clubs. Friday passed without incident; Servon was raving.

Saturday, mid-day, still no news.

The viscount suddenly thought to himself that the wretched Loiseau was mocking him, and that in addressing this letter to him his only intention had been to make certain of his silence in order to allow himself time to escape.

And in truth it appeared only too probable.

Upon this the unhappy Servon thought of death, and, with the promptitude of an over-excited brain, he began to plan suicide.

It only needed to fasten his cravat to the bars of the window, to get on the table, to pass a running knot round his neck, and to give the table a shove with his foot, to launch himself into eternity.

He threw a last despairing glance on the door, and feverishly seized three handkerchiefs, which he twisted into a strong cord, after having joined them one to another. Hastily, as if for some pressing task, he made a running knot, fastened one of the ends of this improvised rope to one of the bars of the window, and, mounting on the table, he prepared to put an end to his existence.

The sound of bolts being drawn outside made him start. He

jumped quickly to the ground, and, not without surprise, he saw the governor of the prison enter his cell.

"Good day, sir," said this grave official, with marked politeness ; "I bring you good news. I have just received the order to set you at liberty, and from this moment you are free."

These magic words, "You are free !" which, three days before, would have thrown Servon into a state of frantic joy, found him cold as marble. He briefly thanked the well-meaning governor, who seemed much surprised at the indifference of his prisoner, and dressed himself slowly, thinking, as he did so, that outside the prison walls he should find plenty of cares on his mind.

Liberty for the viscount was the unknown.

Why had it been so suddenly restored to him after he had been so unjustly deprived of it ?

What had passed since he had been cut off from the world, and what position had his extraordinary adventure placed him in ?

He determined, before all, to ascertain upon what ground he was going to walk, and he naturally thought of going to see Charles de Précey, the only friend whom he thoroughly trusted.

An hour afterwards the viscount, having got over the formalities of release, was driving in a cab towards the Rue Royale, where Précey lived.

He was not uneasy at the reception which was in store for him from his oldest and most tried friend, but he experienced a sort of repugnance on thinking that he should have to tell him his wretched tale. He looked vaguely at the boulevards invaded by a noisy army of sweepers ; he examined the still sleeping houses. Arrived at his friend's door, Servon rang like a man who has no time to spare. The valet who came to open the door looked at him in surprise, and told him that his master was still sleeping. As a matter of fact, it was only eight o'clock ; but the viscount insisted, and followed on the servant's heels into Précey's bedroom, who was stretching himself, and swearing beneath the clothes.

"You ?" he growled, when he had succeeded in opening his eyes. "What the devil has brought you here, waking me up ? Are you mad, to be rushing about the streets before daylight ? Where have you come from ? I'll bet you lost again last night ?"

At this flood of incoherent words, Servon's surprise was unbounded.

Précey seemed not to know of his adventure. But, then, from whence had the parcel which he had received in prison come ? The viscount had not come to the end of his surprises.

"Oh ! I remember now," continued Précey ; "you've just come home from hunting, for I sent you some clothes. But how did you get the idea of going boar-hunting at Solonge, in this dreadful weather, and of setting out without even giving yourself the time to tell your man ? It looks to me like a fairy-tale, and I should say there's a lady in the case. I did not think you were such a Don Juan."

Poor Servon's face must have worn a look of comical surprise, for Précey, who was now thoroughly awake, burst out laughing as he looked at it.

"Ah, ah!" he continued, "you've lost your senses over your love affair. Look at yourself in the glass, and see how queer you look."

Servon tried to collect himself, and stammered :

"Yes, yes—I was obliged to go off very suddenly—but I didn't know—I forgot—"

"Look here, you've certainly lost your senses, and if it is really necessary to bring them back again, I'll give you an account of the way the week has been spent. Last Saturday I invite you to dinner for the next day at my place—a little feast which I had organised, and which, I may state parenthetically, was charming ; you accept ; your place is laid, and naturally you do not turn up. We went so far as to wait for you, and you were the cause of the partridges being too much done. I had forgiven you, and had thought no more about it when—on Monday, I think—a gentleman calls on your behalf at an extraordinary hour. He is very polite, this gentleman ; but he was brought up in your school, and he rouses people very early. He tells me that you have gone off without having the time to inform your man, and asks me for a message to him in order that a parcel which he is to hand over to you may be given to him. I write what he wishes, without understanding much about your doings ; as I knew you were always rather eccentric, I don't trouble myself further about it. But your vacant look begins to make me suspicious. Have you been victimised by some thief who made use of me to clothe himself at your expense ? It would be a queer business. Come, did you receive the parcel, yes or no ?"

"Yes, yes—I had forgotten ; the man came from me, and I am much obliged to you."

The poor viscount said this without knowing much what he was saying. He felt the necessity of putting a good face on it, and at the same time he was dying to know what had happened during his absence.

Was it really possible that his arrest was not known ?

A fresh question from his friend baffled him completely.

"But," said Précey, "what brings you here at an hour when all honest folks are fast asleep ? You are an early bird, and no mistake. Its a mania very foreign to your former habits, and I'm seriously uneasy about you, my poor friend."

The joke was to the point, and it was absolutely necessary to find some explanation for such an early visit.

"It's simple enough," replied Servon, endeavouring to regain his self-possession. "I've just come from the Orleans station, and I don't want any sleep."

"That's no reason for waking other people up."

"Correctly reasoned ; so I shall allow you to swear at me, on condition that you get up and give me some breakfast."

" I must be very fond of you not to kick you out ; but now you've awoke me, the damage is done, and I suppose the best thing I can do is to invite you to breakfast."

An hour afterwards Servon was seated with his friend before a cutlet and a *pâté de foie gras*, which he attacked with the appetite of a shipwrecked sailor.

He hoped Précey would touch of his own accord on the subject which interested him most, and the latter did so upon allusion being made to the club and cards.

" By-the-bye," said he, " do you know the grand news ? "

" What is that ? "

" Why, the death of that rascal Pancorvo, of course. You don't see the Police Gazette at Sologne, then ? "

" It's very little read."

" Yes, my dear fellow, this nobleman from beyond the seas has met with an end worthy of his deserts. He was picked up assassinated in some den in Montmartre, and the most peculiar thing is that his murderer is none other than one of the footmen at the club. You know that dark one, Antoine or Richard. I don't remember now."

" What absurd story are you telling, and what connection is there between Pancorvo and the servant whom I knew well, and who had certainly not the look of a cut-throat ? "

" Ah ! that's the rub. It appears that our partner Pancorvo was simply the chief of a band of robbers, and that Richard served as his spy for nocturnal expeditions. If ever I introduce any one at the club without knowing all about him, you are at liberty to call me a raving lunatic."

" The fact is, that you ought to have made inquiries."

" Upon my word, that's good ; are you in the habit of asking people you meet on your travels for their papers ? This Pancorvo was a rascal ; but in the East people are not so particular, and I was glad enough to meet him."

" And the assassin. Has he been arrested ? "

" Far from it ; he got a start, and must be far from Montmartre at the present moment. The police are making inquiries, as usual, but I think they'll have to inquire for a long time. They say even that heaps of people have been arrested, and there are all sorts of stories flying about ; but I can tell you that this has been the sole topic at the club for the last week, and I begin to be so sick of it that I should prefer some other."

In spite of his desire to know more, Servon saw that it would not be prudent to insist, and he rose to go, not being sorry to find himself once more on his way home.

There, too, he found at once that every one was ignorant of his terrible adventures. The viscount's man had handed over the linen to a gentleman who had called with a note from Monsieur de Précey, and, on the information of the same gentleman, he was

expecting his master at the end of the week, so that Servon's return did not surprise him any more than his departure.

Thus, this mysterious protector who had watched over Servon for the last two months still continued to do so, and an unknown friend had performed the double miracle of establishing his innocence before the magistrate and concealing his arrest from the public.

The viscount began to believe that he was living in a fantastic world, like one of the personages in Hoffmann's stories.

One feeling only still bound him to real life. This was the feverish desire to unravel this inextricable tangle of incomprehensible circumstances.

He felt that it would be impossible for him to regain his peace of mind, as long as he failed to see his way clearly to the bottom of them.

But from whom could he get any information ? He could not question any one, without running the risk of disclosing his unfortunate adventure. After much hesitation Servon decided to apply to the magistrate himself. He said to himself that a man was not set at liberty without good and sufficient reason, and, acting on this idea, he determined to go the very next day to the Palais de Justice.

VI.

ON the day before the one on which Henri de Servon had been so unexpectedly released, the magistrate who had the Montmartre case in hand had sought his private room early. Several witnesses had been summoned for mid-day, and, as he awaited the moment to examine them, the conscientious magistrate was turning over numerous papers relating to the crime committed in the deserted house.

However probable appeared the complicity of Viscount de Servon in this murder, the magistrate still had his doubts, and before examining this fashionable prisoner afresh he wished to inform himself as to the different persons implicated in this affair, so different from the vulgar crimes which came under his notice every day.

He was endeavouring to seize a thread which would guide him through this maze and explain to him a crime of which, as yet, he perceived neither the consequences nor the causes. The causes gave him most anxiety, for the old axiom, *is fecit cui prodest*, will always be true, and it was impossible to allow that the Viscount de Servon, with his fortune, could have associated himself with these robbers to kill and rob a man, however rich he might be.

The idea of revenge was more probable, and it was necessary, first of all, to determine what ties could have connected a man in the best Parisian society, a wealthy American, and a club footman.

On the other hand, the nocturnal attacks which had happened so recently, and which the same magistrate had had in hand, had

not slipped his memory, and a kind of vague intuition inclined him to suspect a mysterious connection between these crimes and the Montmartre murder.

In order to enlighten himself, the magistrate had naturally had recourse in the first place to the archives of the Prefecture of Police, where so much formidable information is buried, and at his request all the information which had been able to be collected with regard to the three principal actors in this mysterious drama had been sent to him.

That which related to Henri de Servon was insignificant.

Described as a fast man and a gambler, the viscount had against his name none of those awkward notes which, after a catastrophe, emerge from amidst the dusty caves where they have been lying, like the sea-wrack which rises to the surface of the water after a storm.

The footman, Loiseau, had, so to speak, no history. Arrived in France less than a year before, nothing beyond a note of this fact appeared in the archives, and he had never given any cause for complaint.

His reputation must have been a very good one even, for under quite recent circumstances, *à propos* of the nocturnal attacks, all the club servants had been watched, and this had been the case with Monsieur Loiseau, as with the others, without the suspicious circumstance of his double domicile being even suspected. The certificates which he had produced in order to enter the service of the club had been narrowly examined. They appeared to be regular and truthful; only they were invariably from foreigners who had left France. Not one of the masters whom he had served could be met with.

As for himself, he was sought for with all the activity of the French police; but the pursuit had been fruitless, and Loiseau had disappeared suddenly and left no trace. It was begun to be feared that he had found some means of getting out of the country, although his description had been forwarded to all the frontiers. The police notes on the victim were the last hope, and the magistrate studied them with scrupulous care.

"Monsieur de Pancorvo (Bias-Esteban)," said the report, "aged about fifty, arrived in Paris in the month of January, 1848, describing himself as charged with a mission by the Government of Equator.

"This State not having a representative in Paris at that time, it was impossible to verify this allegation. Evidently a native of Spanish America. Appears to have formerly lived in France.

"The possessor, on his arrival in France, of a letter of credit of one million, issued by the firm of Rothschild, of Naples, and by this time quite exhausted. Described as having had large losses on the Bourse.

"His household in Paris consisted of an Irish steward, who

disappeared on the night of the Montmartre murder, and who is being actively sought for ; a negro coachman, born at the Antilles ; and two grooms, who appeared to be of some Eastern nationality. These three individuals are in the hands of the police."

Whatever there might be suspicious about Monsieur de Pancorvo, there was nothing in this report calculated to enlighten the magistrate as to the motives which had enticed this foreigner into the Montmartre ambuscade. And, besides, it did not appear that the victim had been robbed. They had found on Monsieur de Pancorvo's body his watch, his jewellery, and his purse and a large sum in gold. His pocket-book had been opened by the assassins, for it bore the marks of bloody fingers ; but it contained still five thousand-franc notes. It was to be supposed that the murderers had sought a letter which they had an interest in destroying. These facts only caused the whole affair to become more desperately complicated, and the zealous magistrate, who applied all his faculties and all his experience to the discovery of the truth, could not conceal from himself that he had lost all scent in the midst of this ocean of contradictory matter.

Leaning over his desk, his head resting on his hand, he rapidly ran over, even to the smallest detail, the information which the police had placed at his disposal, for he knew that sometimes the most insignificant-looking fact furnishes the key to a hopelessly involved problem. Accordingly, he passed from the account of the Montmartre crime to the reports which dealt with the recent night attacks. But he looked through two enormous bundles of papers of all sorts without making any discovery. The last one relative to the highway robberies was a sort of history of the bands which had infested the streets of Paris for the last twenty years. This report, from the hand of one of the most experienced officials at the Prefecture, ended with the following passage :

"After the year 1845," said this document, "the nocturnal assaults ceased entirely, as much from the conviction of several gangs as in consequence of the dispersal of a most dangerous band, which appears to have owned as its chief, from 1838 to 1843, a foreigner named Morgan. This secret society was composed exclusively of natives of the Levant. It was known to all its members under the name of *Chrob ou Horob*. These words, probably Arabic, served as a watch-word for the gang, who all succeeded in eluding the police after the disappearance of their chief, which happened towards the end of the year 1842."

The author of this report concluded by saying that it did not appear that the late attacks could be connected with any of the old gangs, and that they were probably the act of a few separate malefactors.

Two passages in this collection of retrospective information had struck the clear-sighted magistrate. The robber chief, a foreigner,

who had disappeared seven years before. The robbers of Eastern origin acting under his orders.

Monsieur de Pancorvo was a foreigner, and the two grooms spoke a language which appeared to be Arabic. However slight this information was, the magistrate determined not to neglect it. He decided first of all to see the officer who had signed the report, and he sent for him to the Prefecture, whilst his clerk at the same time wrote a summons for the two suspicious grooms to appear before him.

The police official made his appearance first. His name was Jottrat, and he had followed his difficult profession for more than forty years. He was at that time almost sixty, but age had in no degree impaired his ardour or his efficiency. Prudent, acute, bold, gifted with extreme address and a prodigious memory, he was always employed in difficult undertakings, and especially consulted with regard to past cases.

His head contained a veritable repertory of criminal facts, and when once he had seen a prisoner or a felon, he never forgot him. Honest, too, just as much as if he had more elevated functions to perform, he was appreciated and esteemed by the bench.

The magistrate, who had long known him, questioned him in the hope of discovering amongst his recollections of criminal cases, which were ordinarily so lucid, some precious information. He wished especially to know whether this Morgan, described as the chief of a gang of foreigners, could be Monsieur de Pancorvo.

He soon made certain that this identity was impossible. Jottrat well remembered this individual, whom he had formerly been ordered to watch, and he affirmed that his age by no means tallied with that of the victim of the Montmartre crime. Monsieur de Pancorvo was certainly not more than fifty, and the former robber chief, if he still lived, must have been a good deal over sixty.

"As for the two grooms," added Jottrat, "it will be difficult for me to recognise them, for the band of 1838 was never captured, and the information which I had at the time I received from a detective who had succeeded in getting himself enrolled as a member, and who was never seen alive again. They killed him and threw him into the Seine. However, it is as well that I should see them; I know a dodge which will succeed, perhaps."

"I am expecting them," said the magistrate; "in a few moments they will be here. I have also sent for an interpreter of Eastern languages."

"If you will allow me," said Jottrat, "I will speak to them first."

"Certainly," replied the magistrate; "I have full confidence in your ability."

"When they enter, will you be good enough to step on one side, and do not show yourself; I will answer for the rest."

"I am quite agreeable."

A sound of steps was heard in the corridor, announcing that the prisoners were arriving, with the usual police escort. Jottrat took up his position in the corner of the room which was in the shade, and waited. The door opened, and two men entered who bore little resemblance to ordinary prisoners. The magistrate was completely hidden from view.

Monsieur de Pancorvo's two grooms, arrested at the moment when they were sleeping off in the stables their last night's debauch, presented themselves in a deplorable plight, and their tattered garments added still more to the hang-dog look which was habitual to them. Without other clothing than a pair of trousers of coarse cloth, and their naked feet thrust into yellow leather sandals, their faces wore an almost bestial expression. Their shaven heads showed up the exaggerated height of their cheek-bones, and their eyes, blazing with a fierce light, glistened in orbits surmounted by thick eyebrows. It was quite impossible to mistake these two savages for servants in a good family, and a jury would have convicted them on their looks alone.

They sat down with a stupefied air on two chairs which were offered them. Their guards retired to the far end of the room. Suddenly a guttural voice murmured almost in the rascals' ears the following word :

“*Chrob—?*”

“*Ou Horob !*”

This reply almost immediately left the lips of the two villains, who had started and lifted their heads as if they had heard a signal.

Jottrat issued from his recess and planted himself in front of them, and the magistrate suddenly walked out from his hiding-place. His appearance produced an extraordinary effect on the two wretches. Their haggard eyes became fixed, and scanned with visible anxiety this unknown figure. But Jottrat's look was most reassuring, and his face, enclosed in a pair of respectable white whiskers, was one of those from which absolutely nothing can be gathered. One could read in the eyes of the two pretended grooms that they were wondering whether it was really this honest citizen who had spoken to them. Jottrat, for his part, examined them with his penetrating look, which was accustomed to scanning faces and sounding the thoughts, and one could see that he was calling up all the resources of his marvellous instinct. The magistrate lost nothing of this mute scene, and the clerk appeared petrified.

“Well ?” said the magistrate, with uneasy curiosity.

“Well, sir, if these fellows were ten years older, I could swear that they used to serve under Morgan ; but they appear to me rather too young to have been members of the old gang.”

And, in truth, the two rogues, in spite of their tanned skins and wrinkled faces, hardly looked more than twenty-five.

“It is true,” he continued, “that I have sometimes been mistaken over Arab convicts when I was on a search at Toulon.

Orientals have no particular age, and these two might well be older than they look. What is certain is, that they replied to the password, and I believe we are on the right track."

"Call the interpreter," said the magistrate to one of the policemen.

"I'm very much afraid," replied Jottrat, "that he won't be much good. I know these rogues ; the password escaped them because we took them by surprise ; now they will be as dumb as fishes."

"Let us try, at any rate," said the judge, making a sign to the policemen, who made the two prisoners sit down by leaning on their shoulders.

The two rascals took their seats on two chairs, crossed their legs, Eastern fashion, and put on an expression of stupid composedness.

The interpreter entered and began to translate the questions which the magistrate had prepared. He spoke to them, first of all, in Turkish, without obtaining any answer; but when he had recourse to Arabic the prisoners' tongues suddenly became loosed. They made no difficulty about giving their names and nationality. One was called Ali, the other Omar.

They stated that they were natives of Syria, and said that Monsieur de Pancorvo had taken them into his service the year before, during his journey in the East. As to their master's habits and the life which he led, and especially with regard to the Montmartre affair, they knew nothing, or would tell nothing.

"We were engaged to attend to the horses, and we meddled with nothing else," such was their invariable reply. It was vain to press them in a hundred different ways, or to set traps for them ; they never varied, and never departed from their stubborn attitude.

"The master is dead," they said, "and death releases servants from their engagements. We demand to be paid our wages and sent to Beyrouth."

It was plain that by persisting in this plan a satisfactory conclusion was out of the question, for the explanations of these rogues were natural and even plausible. So the magistrate had finally to fall back on the only glimmer of light which had shone for an instant in this obscurity, and he told the interpreter to repeat the words which in Jottrat's mouth had produced such a strange effect. But this time the rascals, being better prepared, did not budge. One of them had the impudence to ask what was meant by the words.

It was becoming evident that, in the absence of fresh information, nothing could be got out of these men, and the magistrate decided to send them to prison, intending to examine them later, when he should gather some decisive news elsewhere. His special idea was to confront these savages with some of the victims of the night attacks. Before concluding the sitting he wished to try and frighten them, and he caused the interpreter to inform them that they would be sent to prison until they told the truth.

"Allah Kérim ; God is merciful," replied the two Arabs with one voice ; and this favourite formula of Mussulman fatalism ended the interview.

"What do you think of these men ?" said the magistrate to the interpreter, when the prisoners had been taken off.

"They are not natives of Syria, as they say," replied the latter, an old dragoman who had lived in the Levant. "They speak the Arabic of the Barbarian States, yet not the dialect of Algiers. I should rather believe them to be from Tunis or Tripoli."

"And what is the meaning of the words which I told you to repeat to them ?"

"Chrob ou Horob ?"

"Yes. Is it really Arabic ?"

"They are three Arabic words which mean, literally, 'drink and flee.'"

"That is odd—'drink and flee !' It would hardly bear the meaning which we should attach to the phrase."

"Oh !" said Jottrat, "a meaning is not essential to a password."

"But," said the interpreter somewhat timidly, for he did not care about departing from his own functions in order to aid justice, "I remember vaguely having heard in the East that there is somewhere in Africa, near Dernah, I believe, a spring which serves as a rendezvous for all the robbers of the district, and which bears this name."

"It is very strange," said the magistrate thoughtfully. "I am afraid I shall have ample opportunity for seeing them again, for this wretched affair will take some time to look into."

As soon as he had dismissed the interpreter, the magistrate continued with the detective the examination of all the facts of this interview which had thrown so little light on the subject.

Jottrat, for his part, had made up his mind. These two men must have been members of Morgan's gang, or, at least, they knew all the secrets of it, for the experiment of the password had been conclusive. The magistrate was less convinced, and he was well aware that justice, which never contents itself with conjectures and probabilities, must seek elsewhere.

"We shall never know anything," said he with a sigh, "as long as Loiseau is at large. It is a fatality that this man should have slipped through our fingers. I have communicated with all the magistrates in France, and especially with all those on the channel coast—for, I don't know why, I have a presentiment that this man has escaped by the sea—but without success ; three days have passed, and not a scrap of information !"

A policeman entered with a sealed despatch.

"Ah !" cried the magistrate, with a start of joy, "it is from the special commissary at Boulogne-sur-Mer."

He tore open the envelope impatiently and read eagerly. As his

eyes ran over the despatch his face clouded over, and when he had finished it he threw the letter on a desk with a gesture of vexation.

"It's all over," he cried ; "we are fated to know nothing. Loiseau has succeeded in escaping to England. Look," he added, handing the despatch to Jottrat.

The detective began to read aloud the following report, carefully dwelling on each sentence :

"Yesterday evening," wrote the Boulogne commissary, "I was informed that three men, strange to the place, had arrived at a little sailors' inn in the Faubourg de Capécure. They had arrived about mid-day by the Paris road, in a trap which they had hired from the postmaster at Etaples, and which they abandoned, before entering the town. They spoke English, had no luggage, and paid for everything handsomely, and in gold. One of them was wounded in the head and arm.

"Suspecting that these individuals might be those who had been described to me in the prefect of police's despatch of the twenty-second instant, I immediately communicated with the police, and at nightfall I went to the Frigate Inn, accompanied by two detectives, and followed at a distance by a picket of four policemen, commanded by a brigadier.

"When we arrived at the aforesaid inn, the landlord, Thomas, voluntarily informed us that the three suspected travellers had left about twenty minutes before, and that they had asked the way to the village of Portel. I at once ordered the police to proceed to Portel, by way of the sands, whilst I, with the two detectives, started for the same place by the road which runs along the top of the cliffs. After an hour's walk we arrived at the village.

"The night had fallen ; but the weather being very clear and the moon full, we saw the three men at the foot of the cliffs. They seemed to be planning some means of gaining a vessel which was under sail at a few cables' lengths from the shore.

"We hastily descended by the path which leads to the port ; but, whether we were discovered, or whether the fugitives had made up their minds, two of them entered the sea and succeeded in reaching the vessel, which set sail at once, whilst the third fled along the sands in the direction of Boulogne.

"I did not think it necessary to follow him, supposing that he would meet the police whom I had sent by the same way ; but the brigadier joined me half-an-hour afterwards, and informed me that the high tide which was already at that time washing against the cliffs had prevented him from following the beach, and obliged him and his men to take to the road.

"It is probable that the man who did not embark was himself overtaken by the sea and drowned. I ordered a search to be made along the whole extent of shore, but the body has not as yet been

found. The vessel which took off the two others had been cruising all day in sight of shore, and everything points to the fact that she was English.

"I hastened to make a summary statement of these facts to the prefect, and to-morrow I shall have the honour of sending him a more detailed account.

"P.S.—One of my men states that he was able by the light of the moon to distinguish the individual who remained on land, and that he carried his arm in a sling. This circumstance would explain why he did not take to the sea like the others, and makes it very probable that he perished by following the sands."

"Three men, of whom one was wounded," said Jottrat, after a moment's silence. "Probably Loiseau, the Irish steward, and the third rascal whom we do not yet know of. These country detectives are really too clumsy. The most important fact is that the wounded man has not been able to escape. Perhaps he is not drowned as they think, and through him we shall find the others."

"No, Jottrat, no," said the magistrate, shaking his head doubtfully, "we shall not find the others. There is a fate about this affair, and as long as the mysterious individual—this Loiseau—is at large, our efforts will come to nothing."

At this moment hurried steps were heard in the passage which passed the door of the magistrate's private room, and that metallic sound of scabbards knocking up against the walls which always denotes the presence of policemen. At the same time some voices, which seemed to be engaged in some dispute, became so loud that they finally attracted the magistrate's attention.

"Go and see, Jottrat, what that can be, and put a stop to that noise."

"Who knows," said the old detective, "whether it is not some news arrived?"

But the door opened and there entered a tumultuous group, at the head of which marched a police inspector. Four policemen were with great difficulty holding a great strong fellow who appeared to be in a violent rage.

"What is it?" said the magistrate, with dignified coolness.

The prisoner became quiet as if by magic. The moral superiority of the magistrate had tamed him in a moment. The inspector took advantage of this calm to speak.

"Sir," said he, "here is a man who was arrested this morning at the Clichy barrier, driving a trap which had been described to us by a telegraphic despatch from the special commissary at Boulogne-sur-Mer."

The magistrate and the old detective exchanged glances.

"He made the detectives whom I had posted at the customs house run as far as the Boulevard Saint-Martin, and he has almost killed two of them. The man whom he was driving took the opportunity

of escaping, between the barrier and the boulevard, and he must be one of the Montmartre murderers, for his description tallies exactly with that which has been given us—”

“A murderer with me! There’s no fear of that,” interrupted the fellow, shrugging his shoulders.

The magistrate understood in an instant. They had possibly a clue, and, in order to utilise it, it was above all things important not to alarm the prisoner.

“Who are you, my good man?” he asked gently.

“Jean Wimereux, of Marquise, four leagues from Boulogne, at your service, sir.”

“You have just been arrested in the company of a man of whom the police are in search.”

“Upon my life, good sir, I don’t know why. I’m a driver by trade; driver of the Place Boulogne—cab No. 52—and if I can’t drive my customers now—”

“Come, don’t be frightened, and tell me all about this.”

“Here goes,” said the man, quite reassured. “The day before yesterday evening, at six o’clock, I was coming from Portel to Boulogne by the cliff road.”

On this the magistrate became doubly attentive.

“I had been driving two Dutch herring merchants, saving your presence, and was coming back empty. Just on the top of a little hill—the moon was so clear I could see as well as by daylight—I see in a field of colza a man running towards me. I don’t know where he came from, for there’s nothing but the cliff on that side, and it’s so steep that a goat couldn’t climb up it. Well, no matter; he calls out to me to stop, me who wasn’t sorry to come back with a fare; I wait, and I see a fellow coming who didn’t look up to much good, that’s true; for all, he was well-dressed. He was as pale as a Parisian with the sea sickness, and an arm slung in a handkerchief into the bargain. ‘Driver!’ he calls out with the twang of the Englishman that he was, ‘a hundred francs to take me to Abbeville to-night.’ ‘Right,’ says I, and he gets in.”

“Cut it short, cut it short, my good man,” said the magistrate, who could hardly restrain his impatience. “This man proposed to you to drive him to Paris, and you drove him there. What happened on your arrival? Where did this so-called Englishman tell you to drive him?”

“Below Passy, to the Bons-Hommes barrier.”

“To Passy! That is strange. He said nothing else to you?”

“Not ten words the whole way.”

“Good; I believe you. Inquiries will be made about you. If you have spoken the truth you will be released to-morrow. Have this man taken to the *dépôt*,” added the magistrate, addressing the inspector, “and bring the detectives’ report to my room to-morrow morning.”

When the magistrate found himself alone with Jottrat again, he

could not help expressing his disappointment. "What did I tell you?" he said mournfully. "Isn't there a fatality about this affair? Detectives posted at all the barriers, the assassin recognised, and yet he escapes."

"Yes, but we are certain that he has not crossed the Channel, and we have a clue—Passy."

"'Tis very vague. What could his business at Passy be, and why does the wretch return to Paris?"

"Who knows? Perhaps to place in safety some important papers, or to destroy some evidence against himself."

"I can hardly credit such audacity. However that may be, do not lose a minute, and put your best men on the track. To-morrow morning I will question the driver again, and we can examine any information you may have gathered. I shall see you to-morrow, then, and let us hope that we shall have more luck. But I am very much afraid that the Montmartre crime will remain unpunished, like so many others."

As he spoke, the magistrate had risen and was preparing to leave his room, when the porter entered and informed him that a gentleman, who refused to give his name, asked to speak to him about a matter of importance connected with the Montmartre affair.

"I don't know whether I have time to see him," said the magistrate. "I must see the attorney-general this morning. However, 'a matter of importance,' information is not very plentiful, and I won't neglect this. Ask him to come in. Remain, Jottrat; I shall perhaps want you."

The porter left the room, and a moment afterwards he introduced the visitor. He was a man of middle height and elegant appearance. He was entirely clad in black. His face was of a livid pallor, and his eyes shone with sombre fire. He carried his arm in a sling, and wore a bandage on his forehead. He halted an instant on entering the room, as if to collect his strength, then he walked slowly up to the magistrate's desk. He might have been the statue of the commander in the *Festin de Pierre*, and at this strange apparition the magistrate asked himself whether he had not to deal with a madman.

He stepped back instinctively, and the phantom in black still advanced.

"What is your business with me, sir?" said the magistrate haughtily, scandalised by this theatrical entry.

"I killed Monsieur de Pancorvo!" said the stranger. Then he reeled and fell senseless at the magistrate's feet.

VII.

LOISEAU had been carried to the Conciergerie Hospital. It was a large vaulted room, with a massive roof supported by large pillars. Feeble rays, which filtered through the narrow, barred windows,

lighted this abode of suffering. At the far end, on a narrow iron bedstead, the pale face of the Montmartre murderer showed up against the grey serge curtains. He had not yet recovered consciousness. A sister of charity standing at his bedside was holding some smelling-salts to his nose. On three chairs ranged at the foot of the bed three men clothed in black were waiting—the magistrate, his clerk, and the doctor. Suddenly the wounded man heaved a deep sigh, stretched out his arms as if to seize some object which was escaping him, and some incoherent words issued from his lips.

“George!—Ellen!” murmured the wretched man.

“He is delirious,” said the magistrate, in a low voice; “we shall learn nothing yet.”

“No,” said the doctor, “it is the end of the swoon.”

He rose, approached the sick man, and poured into his half-opened lips a few drops of strengthening cordial. The wounded man opened his eyes and cast a glance around him. They saw from his look that he was asking: “Where am I?”

Then his eyelids fell, and two great tears rolled down his cheeks.

“How do you feel?” said the doctor, who had taken his hand in order to feel his pulse. “Better, do you not? Yes, the pulse is quicker. In an hour you will be well; but for the present do not excite yourself, for the fever is approaching.”

Loiseau lifted his head, made an effort to raise himself upon his pillow, and said in a weak voice:

“Thank you, sir; I feel strong now, and I can talk.”

The magistrate, astonished, looked inquiringly at the doctor, who shrugged his shoulders, as if to say: “It is imprudent, but if it is necessary, do as you will.”

At the same time he studied the pale face of the man who had just accomplished this remarkable effort of will in order to overcome the weakness which follows a fainting-fit of three-quarters of an hour.

The magistrate approached the patient. His face expressed at once pity and the feeling that he must do his duty. The wounded man was possibly dying; but it was necessary, at any price, to interrogate him before the death agony closed his mouth.

“I feel much for your sufferings,” said the magistrate, “and I will cease the examination as soon as you feel fatigued. But I have only a few questions to ask you to-day. Are you ready to answer me?”

“Yes, sir.”

“I expect the truth from you,” added the worthy magistrate, in a gentle voice which went to the heart of the unfortunate man lying on the bed of suffering.

The patient made a sign of acquiescence, and the clerk, who had taken his place at the table, got his pen ready.

“Your name is Loiseau?” began the magistrate.

“Yes, sir.”

“Is this your real name?”

"It is the one by which I have been known since I came to France. I have another, which I do not wish to disclose." And he added after a pause : "I do not wish to dishonour the memory of those who bore it."

"I must tell you that it is a pity that you should begin by refusing to reply to questions which may have serious consequences."

"I only ask for death," said Loiseau, "and the freedom of an innocent man," he added, with a beseeching look.

"You admit having murdered Monsieur de Pancorvo ?" said the magistrate, visibly affected.

"Yes, I killed him," replied Loiseau, who had shuddered on hearing this name.

"Tell us your motive and the circumstances of the crime."

The wounded man's eyes lit up ; the blood rushed to his cheeks, and he replied in a ringing voice :

"The man you have just named was a monster ! I avenged his victims. I am not an assassin ; I am the instrument of God's wrath." He fell back upon his pillow, as if exhausted by the effort which he had made.

"I am willing to believe you," continued the judge, after having considered for a moment. "But the law is not content with bare statements ; it requires proofs. Tell me, then, the cause of your hatred for Monsieur de Pancorvo. And it is my duty to inform you," added the good magistrate, as if he was afraid of setting a trap for the prisoner, "that whatever these causes may be, you will still have to answer for a murder. The law may find excuses for revenge, it cannot absolve it."

"I know it, sir, and I am ready to pay my debt to the justice of man ; I rely only on the mercy of God. As for the causes of this man's death, I cannot tell you them. The secret is not mine alone."

"You speak of God," interrupted the magistrate quickly ; "take care that the desire to shield your accomplices does not tempt you to offend Him by telling a lie."

"I have never told a lie," murmured the prisoner, in a hollow voice.

Then he added in a firmer tone : "I will tell all that I am permitted to reveal to justice, without injury to the memory of those whom I have loved ; but I will say nothing more."

A profound silence reigned in this vast gothic room, and the spectators seemed to be collecting themselves to hear this supreme confession.

"I have told you," said Loiseau, in a slow voice, "that the man I killed was a monster. As for my accomplices, I had none other than the witnesses of this duel of vengeance, and I cannot give their names. But there is a man whom fate has placed under the weight of a terrible accusation, and I wish to save this man. Monsieur de Servon is innocent, and it was to clear him that I came and gave myself up."

Loiseau stopped, exhausted.

The magistrate, who had listened with eager attention, was in deep thought. The voice of the dying man had an accent of sincerity which it was impossible to mistake.

"This man would never tell, were he on the scaffold," said the magistrate to himself, and with that dexterity which practice in criminal affairs gives he turned his questions upon the only point upon which the prisoner seemed inclined to yield—Servon's innocence. He continued :

" You state that Monsieur de Servon is innocent ? "

" Perfectly innocent."

" I thought so myself at one time ; but his presence at the scene of the crime has been proved, and if you say that his part was limited to being a witness of this murder—of this duel, if you like—I must tell you that this fact alone constitutes complicity, and that the law punishes the accomplice equally with the principal."

" Monsieur de Servon was not present at the murder."

" Explain yourself, then," said the magistrate, redoubling his attention. The poor viscount, who was at that moment in a state of despair in his cell, had little idea that the question of his life or death was being decided.

As a matter of fact, the conscientious magistrate had not forgotten one of the points in Servon's favour, and, besides, they had been carefully committed to writing by the clerk. It was plain that he could not have come to an understanding with Loiseau, since he had been arrested the very day after the crime. If the explanations of the wounded man agreed with his, his innocence was established.

" I am about to speak, sir," said the prisoner, " and I pray God, who will, perhaps, forgive me in the next world, because of the troubles which He has sent me in this one, I adjure Him to open your heart to my words, and to inspire you with the conviction which can save a man who was but the victim of his own imprudence. Monsieur de Servon formerly rendered me a service to which I owe the fact that I was able to pursue the task to which I had consecrated my life. Two months ago Monsieur de Servon was attacked and robbed in the street. Although I did not succeed in preserving him from the grave danger which he then ran, I was at least able to restore to him the money which he had had stolen. I paid thus a debt of gratitude, but this act had fatal results. It excited beyond measure Monsieur de Servon's curiosity, and an unfortunate act of imprudence of which I was guilty made him decide to watch and follow me. I knew it and I could not prevent it, for, in order to put a stop to his mad pursuit, it would have been necessary for me to have revealed to him secrets which did not belong to me."

The magistrate made a sign of incredulity, and Loiseau continued in a slower voice :

" The man who has devoted himself to the accomplishment of a task like mine has no right to allow himself to be turned aside from

the path which God has marked out for him. I was progressing towards my object without looking to the right or left. I was in hopes, besides, that Monsieur de Servon would grow weary of following me, and that I should accomplish my mission without encountering him in the terrible path upon which I was walking. God decided otherwise. During that bloody night when I avenged my wrongs, Monsieur de Servon had the fatal idea of coming to Montmartre to watch me. I learnt this for certain on crossing the garden after the struggle. I was severely wounded ; I could hardly walk, and I was obliged to sit down and lean against a tree which bore evident traces of having been climbed. A piece of Monsieur de Servon's blouse had remained clinging to a branch at a few feet from the ground. It must be there still, and possibly his footsteps could still be traced as far as the door which opens on to the steps. I do not know what can have prompted the fatal mistake of which Monsieur de Servon was the victim ; but I am certain that he has told you the truth, and that his account agrees with mine."

As he proceeded with this long recital the wounded man's voice had grown gradually weaker, and it was to be feared that a fresh swoon would prevent him from speaking at all. The magistrate saw this, and made haste. His conviction as to Servon's innocence was almost decided, for Loiseau's confession confirmed the viscount's story in every particular ; and, besides, for the last two days the magistrate had had strong doubts as to the culpability of a man who held such a good position in the world. Other points equally serious remained unexplained, and he wished to try and have some light thrown on them if there was yet time.

"Your statement," said the magistrate, "agrees exactly with that of Monsieur de Servon. I do not mind telling you this much, and I may even add that if your last allegations are found to be correct—and I am about to give orders on this subject immediately—Monsieur de Servon will be released."

"Thank you, sir," said the prisoner, with tears in his eyes. "God will reward you."

"I am only doing my duty in trying to arrive at the truth ; but I have still some questions to put to you, and the best way of thanking me will be to answer them straightforwardly."

"All that I can say without breaking my oath I am ready to say."

"Who are your accomplices ?"

The prisoner shook his head, and did not answer.

"Name the witnesses of the fight, since you persist in calling it a fight."

The wounded man hesitated an instant and said : "Two men bore with me the weight of a terrible secret. These two men witnessed the punishment of the culprit. Both are now in safety on English soil."

"They embarked the day before yesterday at Boulogne, I know, but they will be captured."

"They will not be captured, for God will not allow them to be punished for having aided in the accomplishment of an act of justice."

"Why did you not escape with them?"

"Because I wished to save Monsieur de Servon, and to prevent you from condemning an innocent man. And something tells me that he will be saved, for it was God who preserved me from the rising tide, and who gave me the strength to drag myself to your feet to say to you: 'I alone killed Monsieur de Pancorvo.'"

"I will not insist on this point to-day," said the magistrate, "but I expect from you a straightforward answer to a question which may affect your accomplices. Was Monsieur de Pancorvo the author of the nocturnal attacks of which Monsieur de Servon and many others were the victims?"

"Monsieur de Pancorvo was a scoundrel," repeated the wounded man. "I have already told you so, and I can tell you no more."

"Two of his servants, upon whom grave suspicion rests, have been captured. Can you give me any information about these men?"

"These two men must have done as their master did, but I do not know them."

The magistrate reflected deeply, and, with that rapidity of intuition which makes great magistrates, he saw that the prisoner was not lying, but that he would never confess. The scene had already lasted an hour, and the wounded man was visibly growing weaker. It was time to put an end to the examination. The clerk rapidly read the depositions, which Loiseau had not strength to sign. The doctor wrote a prescription, and took his departure with the magistrate, who could hardly restrain his emotion. The vast room became silent again, and the sister of charity knelt down at the bedside and began to pray.

On the conclusion of his examination the magistrate hastened to have Loiseau's statements verified. The garden at Montmartre had been carefully searched, and the fragment of blouse had been found clinging to the tree which the viscount had had the fatal idea of climbing on the night of the crime. In addition, one circumstance helped to determine the path which he had followed. A hard frost which had occurred after the storm of the twenty-first of January had hardened the mud, and caused Servon's footsteps to remain imprinted on the walks. It was evident that the viscount had not gone further than the tree which had served as his post of observation, and these traces, which murderers leave in spite of themselves, as a kind of judgment book, served on this occasion to clear an innocent man.

Other information had already caused doubts to arise in the magistrate's mind. The story of Servon's disguises and his expeditions in pursuit of Loiseau had been proved, and his explanations had been confirmed in every particular. The actor who lent his

house, and the portress in the Rue de la Michodière, of whom the viscount had made inquiries, had spoken in support of these facts. In the presence of such a mass of favourable evidence the magistrate no longer hesitated, and gave orders for Servon's release. He had, in addition, conducted the inquiry so discreetly that Loiseau's watchful artifices were crowned with success, for poor Servon's adventure was never known to a soul.

Thus, when the viscount entered, at liberty this time, the terrible room where he had so narrowly escaped leaving his honour, the reception that he met with left no room for doubt as to the change which had taken place in the mind of the enlightened magistrate to whom his good star had directed him.

The interview, which Servon rather dreaded, was confined to a conversation between two well-educated gentlemen. The viscount, who was received with perfect good grace, thanked the magistrate in the most approved style, and thought it his duty to renew the explanations which he had already given. But the magistrate stopped him, and told him pleasantly that his story agreed perfectly with the statements of the author of the Montmartre murder. Servon, who was ignorant of Loiseau's arrest, testified a lively surprise ; but, having an eye to the fitness of things, he was very sparing of questions.

"The culprit came and gave himself up," said the magistrate, "and, without entering into the details of an inquiry which should remain a secret, I can tell you that you are completely absolved, and that in so far as concerns the prisoner Loiseau, the circumstances do not seem to have happened as appearances indicated."

"Shall I have to appear in court again?" asked Servon, uneasy at the prospect of having to disclose his wretched adventure at the assizes.

"I hope not," replied the magistrate. "Your arrest was the result of an error quite in keeping with an affair so mysterious ; but nothing in the facts connects you with this case, which will be, I fear, a *cause célèbre*, and I shall do my best to prevent your figuring in it. This disagreeable adventure will be an episode in your life that you will not forget," he added, intending to give the viscount a slight reminder of the well-deserved lesson that he had received.

Servon terminated the interview by announcing to the magistrate his intention of devoting the anonymous gift of sixty-five thousand francs to some charitable work. As he took his leave the good magistrate said to him with a touch of irony :

"When the case comes on at the assizes I will send you some tickets of admission. You will have earned them well."

The viscount returned home with a light heart, and with his mind freed from a terrible weight. At last, then, he was about to resume the free course of the happy existence which God had marked out for him, and which his own foolish imprudence had so madly disturbed. The nightmare which had been oppressing him for the last

three months had come to an end, and the happy Servon gratefully breathed the air of liberty. One anxiety only marred his joy. What would become of poor Loiseau ?

The viscount, in spite of all his freaks, had an excellent heart, and he could not forget that in one of the narrow cells, which were too well known to him, languished an unfortunate man who had come to offer his liberty, and perhaps even his life, to set him free. Servon had no doubt that the mysterious Loiseau was the invisible protector who had watched over him for the last three months, and he ardently wished to acquit the debt of gratitude which he had contracted towards this generous stranger.

Accordingly, he took a lively interest in the mysterious inquiry which was being carried on in the dark vaults of the Conciergerie. But nothing transpired outside touching the prisoner Loiseau, and Servon had had too much cause for thankfulness for the secrecy which surrounds criminal proceedings to complain of the silence which had gradually fallen on the Montmartre crime. He became resigned, then, to await the hearing of the case, and he determined to use all his influence to mitigate the lot, whatever it might be, of the unfortunate culprit.

VIII.

THREE months had elapsed since the dramatic events of the month of January. The inquiry had been prolonged to an extent far exceeding all expectation. After the first examination which he had undergone in the hospital, the prisoner had been seized with brain fever, occasioned by the fearful wound he had received on his head. For more than a fortnight the doctor despaired of his life, and the unfortunate Loiseau seemed fated to carry with him to the grave the secret of the drama of Montmartre. The patient's robust constitution triumphed over this terrible ordeal ; but his convalescence was a long one, and the magistrate thought fit, for the sake of humanity, not to inflict too frequent examinations on a man who had miraculously escaped from death. Time was passing, however, and the magistrate saw with pain the moment approaching when he should be obliged, in the absence of further information, to commit to the assizes, in company of two scoundrels, a man whom he could not help thinking, if not innocent, at least very excusable.

After his long illness Loiseau had remained in confinement at the Conciergerie, and the sympathy which he inspired had extended to the whole of the prison staff, from the sister of charity who nursed him to the gaolers charged with his custody. The prison chaplain had made frequent visits to him, which had been received with gratitude. The man who at that time performed this painful duty was a priest who had left, when still quite young, a foreign mission on account of bad health.

His name was Guérin, and he had entered the priesthood somewhat late in life. It was even whispered that violent grief had thrown him—as it has done so many other great minds—into the arms of the Church, and that he had abandoned for an ecclesiastical career an honourable and lucrative profession—the bar—where he had already been very successful. Never had the sublime truths of religion been expounded by a more sympathetic apostle, and his unspeakable charity had brought many wandering souls back to God. Persuasion and consolation, such was his mission upon this earth, and he fulfilled it with all the tenderness of his heart and with all the resources of his remarkable mind.

Many touching and sublime traits were related of him. He had ten times braved martyrdom to evangelise the fierce cannibals of the Malay Islands ; and, since the time when he had been called upon to cease thus to expose his life, he devoted the revenues of a large fortune to the relief of the unfortunate wretches whom misery and vice threw into the prisons. Recourse was had to him to calm grief and comfort despair, and the sympathetic goodness which was depicted on his grave and gentle face softened the most depraved criminals. The governor used to say that with Abbé Guérin there was no more insubordination in the prison.

Tall and thin, slightly bent by the fatigue of long travels, the chaplain had retained the distinguished manners and language of his former position in the world. His lean features, his pale complexion, and his large intelligent eyes gave to his face an indescribable expression of goodness and melancholy. One saw, on looking at this priest, that he had suffered, and that misfortune had taught him to love those who suffer.

He had been summoned to Loiseau's side at the moment when the first examination had concluded. When he arrived the sick man was writhing in the grasp of a terrible delirium, and the sister who nursed him had already begun to make preparations for the last sacrament which the Catholic religion administers to dying men.

Abbé Guérin took in his own hands the burning hand of the unhappy man, who was tossing about uttering incoherent words, and he regarded with a pensive look his face distorted by pain. One would have said that he was endeavouring to find in those troubled features some lost idea, and his preoccupation was so intense, that he forgot to perform the functions of his sacred office. The dying man uttered at intervals disjointed words, and the priest leant over him, as if endeavouring to grasp some meaning in the midst of the incoherent words inspired by fever.

“The wretch—he has killed him—if ever—our son—avenge them—there—in the casket—the proof.”

Then the names which he had already pronounced after his swoon issued from his lips : “George—Ellen.”

And in a voice as feeble as a whisper he added : “Gabriel, where are you ?”

Upon this Abbé Guérin fell upon his knees, and the sister who composedly witnessed this touching scene heard him murmur : "My God ! thou hadst then prepared this grief for me."

The priest remained long in prayer, and when he rose his contracted features gave proof of such agony that the good sister went to fetch the doctor. The latter arrived in haste, but Abbé Guérin had recovered the expression of gentle calm peculiar to his face, and he replied to the affectionate questions which were put to him :

"It is nothing, doctor. A nervous pain to which I am subject ; the impression which the sight of this poor man's agony made on me. He has more need of your attentions than I. Do you think you will be able to save him ?"

"I do not despair of it, although he has received two terrible wounds—that on the skull especially. But the fellow is incredibly strong. Just imagine that in this state he was equal to going to Boulogne, and travelling back pursued by the police."

"May God hear you, doctor ! May He permit you to save this wretched man !"

"In any case there is nothing to fear to-night. Delirium is more terrifying than dangerous ; and if the fever abates a little to-morrow he will have a good chance to recover."

From that day forth Abbé Guérin hardly left the patient's bedside ; and his devotion surprised no one. After this long crisis, when the delirium had ceased, Loiseau saw at his side, with surprise mingled with emotion, the sympathetic face of the priest, whom he did not know, and who had watched over him like a brother. He warmly thanked the generous man who brought him in his despair the consolation of a friend, and he became imbued with a feeling of grateful affection for him. It seemed as if a secret community of trouble bound together these two men—the priest and the murderer. The magistrate, who witnessed this touching spectacle almost every day, wondered whether religion would draw from the culprit that which justice despaired of extorting—a confession.

The inquiry was drawing to a close. The day was approaching when the three prisoners would have to appear at the assizes ; for, in the absence of further information, Loiseau and the two Arab rascals would be implicated in the same affair. In despair at not having been able to overcome the stubbornness of the unfortunate man whom fate seemed to be thrusting on to ruin, the magistrate determined to have recourse to Abbé Guérin's intervention.

To obtain his aid was not an easy task. The chaplain had long before made it a strict rule never to allow religion to interfere with the action of the law, and it was his custom to say that his ministry was not of this world. But the case was so exceptional that the worthy magistrate did not despair of persuading the priest to save this strange prisoner who would not be saved. On the first overtures on the subject being made to him, the abbé, without giving a

definite answer, manifested great repugnance, and asked time for reflection.

The assizes were fixed to take place during the next fortnight. There was no time to lose. After two days of absolute retirement the chaplain presented himself before the magistrate and said : " Whatever it may cost me, I will do as you wish, and I have reasons for thinking that I shall persuade this wretched man to speak. But I wish to hear him alone, and when I have received his terrible confessions, I demand liberty to act as my conscience dictates."

" I have full confidence in your heart and discernment. Whatever happens you shall be free."

" Come, then, sir, and may God inspire us all ! "

It was evening - a beautiful spring evening ; the setting sun was gilding with its last rays the bars of the narrow windows of the cell. Loiseau was reading " The Imitation of Christ " when he saw the magistrate and the chaplain enter. Surprised at seeing them appear together, he rose and waited, foreseeing something was about to happen. The magistrate had stopped near the door. The abbé advanced, took the prisoner's hand in his, and said in a voice broken by emotion :

" Robert ! will you confide to me your troubles ? "

At the name of Robert profound surprise was depicted on Loiseau's features, and he started back as if terrified by a fearful apparition.

" Robert ! " continued the priest, " it is I who ask it—in the name of George !—in the name of Ellen ! "

A piercing cry issued from the prisoner's lips ; he rushed forward and gazed for a moment at the priest's agitated face, then he fell on his knees, crying :

" Gabriel !—Ah ! I will tell all."

" Have the goodness to leave us alone, sir," said the chaplain to the magistrate, who pressed his hand silently and left the room.

IX.

THE month of June had come, and a glorious sunshine was flooding with light the historic room where, for more than half a century, the Seine Assizes have been held. The Palais de Justice had been besieged since morning by a crowd eager to watch the progress of the strangest criminal case which for a long time past had excited the Parisian public. Suspended by a sort of tacit understanding, the strife of the tribune and the bustle of the streets gave way to the *cause célèbre*, and the stirring political questions of that exciting time had been forgotten for a day.

Thus all classes of society were met together on the narrow benches which serve as a *parterre* to this gloomy theatre, where only

real dramas are played, in which the griefs are unfeigned and the tears sincere. This motley audience undulated like the waves of the sea, and gave vent to that confused sound which is as the voice of a crowd. The bench and the jury-box were unoccupied. Awaiting the arrival of the prisoners, a policeman was carelessly mounting guard over that ominous seat where, in turn, are seated crime and misery.

All eyes were fixed on this terrible spot, and people were wondering whether, for the first time, perhaps, for many years, an innocent man would appear on those steps which so many criminals have trod. The reason of this was, that singular rumours had been spread about Paris on the subject of the mysterious prisoner who was about to be tried. It was known that the Montmartre assassin was no ordinary criminal. People talked vaguely of a strange life, distracted by terrible catastrophes. It was whispered that an implacable fatality alone had forced the wretched Loiseau to commit the murder.

But that which excited curiosity to the highest point, was the fact that no one could foresee what was about to happen at the trial. Had the prisoner reserved for the assizes a confession which the magistrate had not succeeded in extorting from him, or would he carry his secret to the grave? Never had a more exciting uncertainty agitated a more numerous and more varied audience. Accordingly, when the last stroke of ten o'clock had ceased to sound from the great clock of the Palais, and when the little side door by which the prisoners enter was seen to open, a profound silence fell upon the anxious crowd, and all heads were at the same moment turned in the same direction.

The mournful procession appeared in the usual order: First two policemen, then Monsieur de Pancorvo's two servants, then two more policemen, and lastly the man on whom all eyes were fixed, Loiseau, the mysterious murderer of Montmartre.

He entered, holding himself erect and with confident look, and walked towards his seat with firm step. He was entirely clad in black, and this funereal costume added to the indescribable look of sadness which was spread over his pale face. The curious spectators greedily scanned his emaciated features, in order to read in them a sign of hope or remorse.

But soon another individual arrived to attract the attention which had already been so vastly excited. A man had just taken his seat below the prisoners' bench, and this man was a priest. Loiseau, bending towards him, had hold of his hands. Already the name of the courageous friend who had brought the prisoner this unexpected succour was whispered in the crowd. People had recognised Abbé Guérin, the chaplain of the Conciergerie, and they were trying to explain his presence on the form where the counsel for the three prisoners were at the same time seated. Had he come to reveal the secret which the prisoner threatened to carry to the tomb, or did he

only wish to assist Loiseau in the heavy ordeal of the trial, before assisting him in his last moments on the scaffold ?

The court was announced. The magistrates and jurymen took their places. The proceedings had begun, and the clerk read the indictment.

The rather vague language of this document gave it to be understood that justice had not succeeded in ascertaining exactly the cause and the circumstances of the Montmartre crime. The public prosecutor had contented himself with clearly and briefly stating the facts. In his opinion the foreigner Pancorvo, the chief of a band of criminals, had been assassinated by his accomplices during a quarrel which had arisen respecting the division of the booty. He passed over in silence all that part of the proceedings relating to the Viscount de Servon, confining himself to stating the fact that Loiseau had voluntarily given himself up, and that he confessed to being the murderer.

The public listened carelessly to this short statement, which gave them no fresh information. If the pleadings were at last about to explain this mysterious case, it was during the examination of the prisoners that the truth would be brought to light.

“Prisoner Loiseau, stand up,” said the president of the assizes.

A shudder ran through the crowd. The Montmartre assassin was standing erect, his eyes fixed and his body immovable.

“Do you still refuse to answer the questions as to your name, your age, and the place of your birth ?”

“I refuse,” answered the prisoner, in a grave voice.

“Do you admit being the author of the murder of Monsieur de Pancorvo, at Montmartre ?”

“Yes, I killed him.”

“You said before the magistrate, and you appear to maintain here, that Monsieur de Pancorvo succumbed in a duel. The law cannot accept this statement, which all the facts of the case belie ; but it is my duty, nevertheless, to ask you to explain yourself more plainly. Speak, then, and tell us what passed on the night of the twenty-first of January.”

“I killed him.”

“You killed him, you say ; but how ? You were wounded, and there may have been a struggle. If this struggle was a fair one, tell us the cause and the circumstances of the meeting.”

“I killed him.”

“Prisoner, I must tell you that your foolish obstinacy is calculated to do you immense harm, and if you persist in refusing to answer me, I shall be forced to take your silence as an avowal of guilt.”

“I tell you that I killed him.”

Each of these replies, given in the midst of a solemn silence, sounded like a funeral knell, and a shudder thrilled through every heart each time that the hollow voice of this man, doomed to the scaffold, repeated this sinister phrase. The feeling of pity with which the fierce resolution of this strange prisoner inspired him

could be seen on the president's face, and it was with visible emotion that he pronounced the following words, the infallible forerunners of certain condemnation :

" Sit down, prisoner. The jury will form its own opinion."

Loiseau let himself drop on to the seat, as if exhausted by a violent effort. He rested his head on his hands, and appeared to cut himself off completely from the trial in which his fate was to be decided.

The examination of the two Arabs was no more fruitful in results. The wretches took refuge in their fatalist stupidity as in defensive armour. The president could extract nothing from them but exclamations, varied in form, but precisely similar in reality : " Allah is great ! Allah is merciful ! Allah will protect us ! " But when the time came for hearing the witnesses, the scene changed completely. The two rascals were identified by the victims of the nocturnal attacks. No doubt existed in this respect, and it was shown that these two men were the veritable authors of the crimes committed in the streets of Paris.

But the interest of the case was elsewhere, and the attention of the spectators was fixed on the wretched man who had just sank down on the seat of infamy. Was he bowed down beneath the weight of his remorse, or did he disdain to defend his honour and his life against fate ?

No one in the crowd, not even among the magistrates, had yet dared to solve the terrible problem submitted by the prosecution. The darkness was becoming gradually thicker, and people were hoping for light. Doubt oppressed all hearts, and every one was expecting certainty. In this case full of obscurity it was felt that God should interpose, and people were counting on Him. Yet the fatal time was drawing near.

The last witness had been heard, and there was silence for a moment, as if every one wished to collect himself for the dreaded catastrophe. The president was about to call upon the public prosecutor.

Suddenly a man rose from the seat occupied by the defending counsel. Abbé Guérin—it was he—cast upon the unhappy Loiseau a look full of profound pity ; then, turning towards the court, he said in a voice which moved all hearts :

" Monsieur le Président, the prisoner has chosen me as his counsel, and I beg you to allow me to speak in his name."

At these simple words the whole audience shuddered with emotion, and the president replied respectfully :

" Monsieur l'Abbé, the court is prepared to hear you."

Then, drawing up his tall figure, lifting his pale face, and turning on the jury his searching look, Abbé Guérin commenced thus :

" Gentlemen, the prisoner has refused to answer ; the prisoner does not wish to be defended. I do not come to defend him ; I come to tell the story of his life."



On the right bank of the Thames, near to where it runs into the sea, is situated the little village of Whitstable. Its only inhabitants are a few sailors, and the houses which line the river are only simple two-storeyed brick cottages ; but it is easy to see that they are inhabited by well-to-do and cheerful folks.

Four years ago a touching scene was taking place in this smiling spot. A little boy was kneeling by a bed on which was lying a woman whose face was deathly pale. Behind him a man was standing, his hands clenched, and his head bent down on his chest. Great tears were rolling down his cheeks. All at once he took the child in his arms and held his face to that of the woman lying on the bed. The poor little fellow imprinted a kiss on a forehead which was as cold as marble, and shuddered from head to foot. He had touched a corpse, and the corpse was that of his mother.

The child's name was Robert Bird, and he had already lost his father. The man was an old sailor who had taken him under his care—his name was Thomas Disney. He was a widower, and had two daughters. Disney lived in a cottage belonging to him, and situated quite close to the river. After having voyaged for many years he had given up the sea in order to follow a more dangerous but more lucrative calling. Whitstable has always been celebrated for its diving operations, and the English divers are almost entirely recruited from among its inhabitants. This industry was little followed at that time, and the hardy fellows who explored the bottom of the sea earned large salaries, not to mention their finds, which were not rare.

By dint of economy and intelligence Disney had amassed a small capital, and had become the head man of a company of divers ; that is to say, he treated directly with the contractors and took over the salvage of wrecks at his own risk.

The elder of his girls was named Mary ; she was a year older than Robert. Ellen, her sister, was three years younger. The latter was the orphan's favourite. Active and good-tempered, she inherited, as old Tom said, her mother's character.

Mary formed a perfect contrast to her. With her Madonna's face, lighted up by large blue eyes of a gentle and melancholy expression, she was as quiet as her sister was lively. Although older, she was plainly under her sister's influence, whose mind was more developed, and Robert did not always deem her worthy to share his games with Ellen.

The three children were brought up together, and on carrying his mind back to those joyous years, Robert often thought afterwards that the old Spanish custom was a right one, of observing as a feast the death of the little beings whom God calls to Himself before they have tasted the bitterness of life. He was thirteen years old when he experienced his first sorrow. One evening the old sailor took him on his knees, and said to him :

“ Robert, my child, you saw your poor mother die. Your father

died, too, far, very far from here, on the other side of the sea. You have no one in this world but poor Tom, and as long as he lives you will be treated as his son, but he will not always be here ; it is time to be thinking of making a man of you. To-morrow I am going to take you myself to Dover, and I shall entrust you to my old captain of the Ariel, who will take you to Paris, where you will learn French, mathematics, and many other things which I never knew."

The boy wept bitterly the next day on kissing his two little companions, and started on his journey with a very full heart. Three days afterwards he was placed in one of the best schools in Paris and remained there six years. The first months of his new life were cruel ones. Robert was a victim to the rather wild timidity of children brought up at home, and he did not know a word of French. This was ample reason to make him the scapegoat of the other boys. Gradually, however, his persecutors left off troubling him. Robert was tall and strong for his age, and he succeeded in making himself respected about the same time as he began to make himself understood. He became then a studious and taciturn scholar. His comrades tormented him no longer, but he took no part in their pleasures. He preferred study to their noisy games, and his only joy was to receive news of his dear friends at Whitstable.

At the end of the sixth year of his stay in this school, where he had passed so many long and sad hours, Robert learned with joy that his foster-father had summoned him home. He was nearly nineteen. The child had become a man ; but his heart had not changed, and the recollections of the cottage still occupied the foremost place in it.

When he arrived at Whitstable, Tom Disney clasped him for a long time in his arms, and told him to embrace his sisters. They were both of them, Ellen and Mary, so tall and handsome that he hardly knew them again. The two children had become two charming girls, and Robert was so taken aback that he did not dare to advance ; but Ellen threw herself first of all on his neck, and Mary followed her example.

Old Tom's affairs had prospered. The salvage of a ship wrecked on the coast of Ireland had brought him in large profits, and every day fresh business was offered to him. His idea was to take his adopted son as a partner, and he wished him to become an engineer, so that he would be able to help him in his undertakings.

It was agreed that Robert should go and complete his studies in London, and that when he had obtained his diploma he should come and direct the operations which Disney meditated. The old diver had all the fanaticism of his profession, and the desire to grow rich was less strong in him than the love of the unknown, and the attractiveness of danger. He sought hazardous undertakings from choice ; those which others had refused. In spite of his age, he still loved to descend to the wreckage of lost ships, and he knew better than any how to discover the treasures hidden within their shattered

hulls. He was learned in all the legends of the sea, and he had no difficulty in inflaming Robert's youthful imagination, so that he left full of ardour and hopefulness. The London engineer was one of those clever, practical men that England produces, and under his care the young man made rapid progress.

A new existence began for Robert. Every month he went to pass a few days at Whitstable; and he often took with him one of his companions, for whom he had acquired a very warm affection. Diego Palmer—such was his name—was born at the Antilles of an English father and a Spanish mother. He was an orphan, and possessed no other means than a small allowance which a maternal uncle made him. Like Robert, he was intended for an engineer, and the similarity of their studies and positions was the first tie which connected them.

He was at that time a handsome young fellow—tall, slender, with a very dark complexion, and black eyes full of fire and boldness. His spirit charmed his friend who, knowing his qualities, recognised in him a real superiority. Occasionally, too, he horrified him by expressing strange ideas. Robert was still of an age when life is smiling, and the bitter words which often escaped Diego shocked and saddened him.

However, the young foreigner had been greeted like a brother at Whitstable. He had at once made the conquest of the good Tom by talking to him of the English colony where he had been born, for the old sailor was charmed to have an opportunity of telling of his travels. As for the two little sisters, as Robert still called them, they were delighted with Mr. Palmer. The elder one especially was never weary of listening to him.

Mary was at that time of a perfect beauty. Her sweet face had retained the angelic purity of childhood; but, like her face, her mind had remained that of a child. One would have said that she was still incomplete, and it appeared as if God had stopped after having endowed her with beauty and goodness. Of all that had been taught her, her sluggish intellect had retained but little. She only knew how to love.

Her father, who had only received a sailor's education, hardly noticed this inferiority; but her sister Ellen was pained at it, and upon more than one occasion she had confided her grief to Robert.

She was the first to perceive the new feeling which had taken possession of Mary. She made inquiries about Diego, his habits, and his character, and she expressed serious fears about her sister's future. In vain Robert eulogised his friend; he did not succeed in completely reassuring her. They, too, loved one another; but they had never thought of telling it. Never to leave one another, and to watch together over their dear Mary—such was the only dream which these two pure and tender souls indulged in. But the fatal moment which was to blast their lives was near.

One day, on his return from a trip to Whitstable, Robert received a letter from his sister.

"Come immediately," wrote Ellen; "I must see you without fail. Do not lose a moment. The happiness of us all is at stake."

Robert started the same evening, very uneasy at this hasty call, and arrived at Whitstable on the morning of the next day. Ellen had come to meet him. She was alone, a fact which had nothing surprising in it, considering the liberty which young girls enjoy in England, and instead of taking Robert to the cottage she followed a path which ran along the beach.

Two miles from the village a rocky point overlooks the sea. The view from here is magnificent. The Thames is so broad that the opposite bank is hardly visible on the horizon, and the white sails of the ships going up the stream seem from afar like flocks of gulls. On this rocky point, where she had so often come and sat when a child, Ellen stopped.

"Robert," said she, "I have something serious to tell you. Mary loves Diego, and she is engaged to him."

Robert gave a start of surprise.

"It is so," she continued, with the same composure; "Mary told me yesterday, and your friend is to come to-morrow to ask her hand of my father. I have a presentiment of evil, but it is too late, and the marriage will take place. Do you not think, Robert, that we should marry too, so that you can aid me in protecting my sister?"

The young man was so moved that he could not find words to reply; but he took Ellen's hand and, trembling, kissed it.

"I brought you here," she continued, "because your poor mother liked to sit here long ago. Swear to me, by her memory, to watch over Mary all your life."

Robert swore, and the two young people, joined for ever by these simple and touching words, took their way back to the cottage.

Old Disney was joyously surprised at seeing his adopted son so soon again. Robert embraced him; but he was so upset by his happiness that he had much difficulty in giving any explanation. When the worthy Tom understood all he could not help crying for joy. The dream of his whole life was about to be accomplished. He only made one condition before giving his consent; it was that his children should never leave him, and Robert promised freely.

But his surprise was great when Ellen told him of Mary's resolution. He stammered, swore a little, even, under his breath, and ended by saying that—if things were thus—if Mary loved the young man—and if the young man was a good fellow, he would have no objection to this marriage, although, to tell the truth, Mary was no housekeeper.

While he spoke thus, stopping each moment to wipe away a tear, Ellen had called Mary, who fell on his neck in her turn. This was too much, and poor Tom had no strength to resist. He tried to scold his imprudent daughter who had engaged herself without his

consent ; but she repeated so often in her sweet voice : " Father, I love him," that he gave in.

The next day Diego arrived at Whitstable.

Robert was rather annoyed at him for his want of frankness ; but Diego was so affectionate towards his friend, so loving with Mary, and so anxious to please old Tom, that he was obliged to forgive him. Ellen alone was rather cold towards him.

The formalities which precede marriage are not so long in England as in France, and it was agreed that the two couples should be united, on the same day, after the short space of one month. Tom Disney had no relations except two cousins whom he never saw ; Robert was absolutely alone in the world, and Diego declared that he had no need of his uncle's consent. This only relative was at the Antilles, and it would have taken much too long to have waited for an answer from him.

Tom was free from prejudices, and it mattered little to him that he had two sons-in-law without family and without fortune, so long as they were honest and hard-working. When he had made a journey to London he no longer doubted that his daughter had made a good choice, for the engineer spoke in the most flattering terms of his pupil Diego. It was decided that they should live at the cottage for the time being, and that they should form one household, Disney having declared that he was rich enough to keep all his children.

The day on which the double marriage was celebrated was a grand one for Whitstable. Thomas Disney was beloved by every one, and the whole population shared his joy. It was easy to see this from the vigour of the hurrahs which were shouted in his honour, and the number of pints of ale consumed in the garden, for Tom did things handsomely, and during the whole day poor and rich profited by the old sailor's hospitality.

Happiness cannot be described, and the remembrance of the days which followed Robert's marriage remained engraved on his mind as the image of the most perfect bliss which a man can taste in this world. The pure and elevated feeling of conjugal love was born in his heart and filled it to the brim. Each day he discovered new qualities in his dear Ellen, and he blessed God who had permitted her to choose him. Mary, who was not naturally expansive, seemed to be happy also, and testified a tranquil joy. Diego was full of tenderness, and the future smiled on the young couple.

The honeymoon lasted two months, during which time the father left his children to themselves. It was Ellen who came to her senses first. She said, laughing, that she would have no idle husband, and that it was time that he got to work again. Mary pouted at the idea of leaving her little husband ; but Robert supported the proposal, and Diego followed suit.

Disney had just at that time started an office in Dover for the submarine works connected with the pier, and it was decided that the two sons-in-law should serve their apprenticeship under him.

Tom said that it was not enough to be an engineer, and that it was necessary in addition to know how to walk about in the "clear shadows," as the divers call the bottom of the sea. In order to save a cargo, the cleverest machinery is not equal, he said, to an intelligent and daring man's two hands ; and the old sailor was right.

Robert had always looked forward to this adventurous calling, and he adopted it with joy. Yet it is perilous work which is accomplished beneath the waves. Clothed in his impermeable costume, his head confined in a thick helmet, his feet and chest covered with sheets of lead, the diver descends slowly to the bottom of the sea. Above him, in a frail boat, two men keep constantly at work at the air-pump which conveys to him the breath of life. One instant of negligence on their part, one false move, and he is lost. When he touches the wet ground, where with difficulty he can find a footing, his head buzzes, his ears bleed. He looks through the glass panel of his helmet, and he thinks with horror that a shock might break this glass ; and that this is death. A cord fastened to his wrist serves him as Ariadne's clue, and when the doubtful light which penetrates to these gloomy solitudes has allowed him to find his way, he must work as if he were breathing the pure air, as if he were lighted by the joyous sun.

The most wretched labourers in the fields or towns sometimes leave off their painful tasks to converse, leaning on their tools ; sometimes they sing gaily, in order to forget their fatigue. But the diver never rests. His companions, if he has any, wander about silently like ghosts, and if he wants to speak, his dead, hollow voice is lost beneath the armour of brass.

This fearful calling, a hundred times more dangerous than that of the samphire-gatherers on the cliffs of Dover, which Shakespeare calls a "dreadful trade," had attractions for Robert since his childhood, and his joy was indescribable the day when his foster-father gave him his first lesson. He hardly felt for an instant that agitation which the feeling of the unknown always inspires, and which, it is said, the bravest soldiers experience at their first battle.

Old Tom was delighted to see his son so brave, and he determined to guide him himself on his first journey. Robert suffered cruelly at first from that strange pain which those in the profession call "toothache and earache ;" but he was young and strong, and had so much enthusiasm that he made rapid progress. He soon learnt to preserve his self-possession, to walk straight to the blocks which form the foundations of the Dover Pier, and to raise them with an enormous lever. Old divers were astonished at his quickness and courage. Diego exhibited less aptitude. He, too, dived under Disney's direction ; but it was easy to see that this perilous life had no charms for him. He doubtless considered it beneath his dignity as an engineer. Perhaps, too, he was afraid, and old Tom, who suspected this, said laughingly to him more than once :

"Look here, Diego, if a man has any fear he's no good for a

diver. And, besides, there are enough in the family. You can make plans of our machines, whilst Robert and I go below to fish up the millions for you."

Six months passed in this way. Their time was divided between the works at Dover and the calm happiness of the cottage. What joy, on arriving on Saturday evening on the cliff which overlooks Whitstable, and seeing the windows of the little brick house glitter in the rays of the setting sun! Ellen and Mary used to come out and meet them. Sometimes they hid themselves behind a row of willow trees which stood by the wayside. Tom would stop the horse, and Robert and Diego would look for them among the trees, until suddenly childish laughs would burst out: they were there. Then they would jump out and kiss their wives, and the two joyous couples would walk together to the village, whilst the father followed slowly behind them.

And then there was the white cloth covering the supper-table, and the clear fire burning in the huge chimney, and the loving conversation indulged in after the meal, whilst Thomas Disney smoked his pipe and looked with tender eyes at his children. For Robert, the whole universe was contained in this blessed cottage. He had no past history; he had no fear for the future, and he would have liked always to live thus. But God had marked out his life, and this happy existence lasted but a short time.

One day at Dover the father received a letter from London, a thing which rarely happened to him. In the evening he told his sons that they would all go back to Whitstable the next day, and during the journey he was evidently very thoughtful. This unexpected arrival caused great joy at the cottage, and when Tom found himself at home again his two daughters' delight brought back his habitual cheerfulness. After supper, when he was seated before the cup of tea prepared by Mary, and poured out by Ellen, the old sailor could no longer remain silent.

"My children," said he, "I have to talk to you about a matter of very great importance. I have a grand plan, and this plan interests you as much as it does me. This is what it is. You know that old Tom Disney is known through the whole of England, and that he is always applied to about difficult jobs. Very well. Here is a letter from a director of a maritime insurance company with whom I have already done some business. He proposes some more to me, but it will bear some reflection. A ship belonging to the East India Company, the Sutlej, has been wrecked in the Mediterranean, on the coast of France. There is not much hope of making anything of it, for it rests on a soft bottom, and it is supposed to have sunk deeply into the sand. The insurance people thought I might recover part of their losses for them, and they are willing to hand over to me the ship and cargo, at my own risk and peril. They ask four thousand guineas. It is about half of what I possess. The Sutlej is laden with cotton; but it contains also a sum of one

hundred thousand pounds sterling, in bars of gold. If we succeed, it means wealth for you and your children. If we fail, it means, perhaps, ruin. And this is why I wished to consult you."

At this unexpected statement Robert felt more astonishment than emotion. Business, and especially business having to do with money, was so strange to him that he never gave it a thought. He did not know what to reply, and he thought that he read in Ellen's eyes that she shared his indifference.

As for Mary, she did not appear even to have comprehended, and she remained absorbed in the contemplation of her husband, who, for his part, had listened to Disney with evident attention and agitation.

Diego took upon himself to answer for all. He said that the job was too good to think of refusing it, and that they must go to London and make further inquiries. An enthusiasm pervaded his words which much surprised Robert, for Diego had always evinced very little liking for submarine expeditions. It was agreed that he should accompany Disney to London, and they started the next day.

During their absence Ellen and Robert compared notes. They had both of them a vague presentiment of harm. It seemed to them wiser to remain in this cottage where they had spent so many happy days. This fortune which they were to acquire by risking their comfort had no temptation for them; but if they were of one mind upon this point, they were equally determined to follow their father's wishes.

Three days afterwards Disney returned with Diego. The latter was radiant. He hardly gave himself time to get out of the trap before calling out to Robert that the affair was settled. Disney, although more quiet, seemed also to be very happy. The old sailor, as crafty as bold, had allowed Diego to go and see the engineers and insurance agents in London, and he had himself discovered, in a tavern near the docks, a sailor and a petty officer who had escaped from the Sutlej. In this low tap-room, seated before a glass of gin, he had learnt more in one evening than his son-in-law had done in three days in the fine offices at Lloyd's.

The two sailors had explained to him in professional terms the position of the ship, the nature of the bottom on which she rested, and the stowage of the cargo. Disney left them, having fully made up his mind as to the chances of the undertaking, and convinced that it was an excellent one. He wished to conclude the bargain before leaving London, and by the next day, with that simplicity and boldness in which the English excel in their business transactions, he had signed an agreement with the company, and had handed them over a cheque on the bank where he kept his account, just like a large merchant.

The die was cast, and all the hopes of the peaceful inhabitants of the village rested thenceforward at the bottom of the Mediterranean, within the sides of a vessel torn asunder by the tempest. They must

succeed at any price. Disney declared that they should all go with him, and it was settled that they should go and take up their abode together on the coast of Provence. The old sailor, without losing an instant, set about choosing a staff of divers selected from the best in Dover. He had improved apparatus manufactured in London ; he provided himself with letters of recommendation to the French authorities, and the little army started on its journey as well equipped as possible. One month afterwards it had taken up its quarters on the coast of Provence, between Toulon and Antibes.

Cape Camarat, near which the Sutlej had foundered, was entirely deserted. The lighthouse, which was built there later, did not exist at that time, and they had to go far without finding a house. After a considerable search, however, they discovered, three miles from the beach, on the slope of a hill covered with magnificent pine trees, a large house, very rusticly built and very simply furnished. It was what the country folks call a *bastide*, with whitewashed walls, a roof of red tiles, and green shutters. There was a large garden, or rather an orchard, full of fruit trees and flowers. The owner, who was a merchant of Toulon, let them have it at a very moderate rent, and Ellen and Mary were soon in possession of their new domain.

The little colony of workmen took up its quarters in tents which Disney had erected on the beach, and, a week after, the work had already commenced. This southern climate produced a very lively impression on Robert. He had always lived beneath the cloudy skies of England, and the radiant sun of Provence appeared to him like some new planet. The immense blue sheet of the Mediterranean was so unlike the muddy waters of the Thames that he thought he was looking upon the sea for the first time. Ellen, and even the tranquil Mary, shared Robert's sensations ; but Disney and Diego, familiarised long ago with hot climates, were much less occupied with these beautiful scenes than with the salvage works. The little colony soon settled down. Ellen superintended so cleverly the arrangements of the house that, at the end of a month, the family might have imagined that they were still at Whitstable.

Two handy servant girls, chosen from among the neighbouring peasants, attended to the house-work, and everything soon wore that look of cleanliness and careful looking after by which an English interior is recognised in any country.

The drawing and dining-rooms were on the ground floor. Each of the married couples had a pretty bed-room on the first and only floor, and Disney took possession of a turret at the corner of the building, which was reached by an exterior staircase. The old sailor preferred this elevated post, because from his window, with the aid of a pair of glasses, he could distinguish his workmen perfectly. The two maids occupied a separate building, which had probably been used as a barn.

From the very first their life was regulated as on a man-of-war.

The three men left home at sunrise ; they passed the day at the works, breakfasted under the tents with the workmen, and only returned in the evening, when supper awaited them. Often Ellen and Mary came and walked on the beach, and their presence was always a sign for rejoicing amongst the workers.

Ellen almost always went and sat down on a high cliff, in the shade of the thick mastic trees which grew around a spring, and from their boats the divers distinguished their white veils, which the breeze caused to wave like signals above the green vegetation.

The work progressed very slowly at first. Before all it was necessary to ascertain the position of the wreck. Disney would entrust to no one the task of performing this first reconnaissance ; but he allowed Robert to accompany him.

All was ready. The air-apparatus had been tried, and the men trained to work it. They could descend without fear, and Robert felt none, although he had never as yet explored the interior of a wreck. He knew that the faint light which penetrates the waves suddenly fails the diver who makes his way amongst these damp ruins. He knew that all there is black, weird, desolate. But old Tom had fortified him against fear, and it was without the slightest feeling of uneasiness that, on a fine morning in the month of May, the young diver descended with his foster-father upon the wreck of the Sutlej. Diego was in one of the boats, and the foreman, John Slough, on the other, attending to the air-pumping apparatus.

The soundings had been correct. Disney and Robert alighted just on the deck of the Sutlej. She had been wrecked in a shallow spot, in ten or twelve fathoms of water at most ; but she had sunk fifteen feet into the bottom. The bows, which had come in contact with the rocks, were totally shattered, and the violence of the shock had separated the ship into two parts at the waist. The masts had been broken by the storm, or cut at the time of the wreck. Only the stumps of them remained.

Disney soon found the main hatch-way, and he began to descend it, making signs to Robert to follow him. They advanced with the greatest care, walking backwards, in order to avoid breaking the glass of their helmets by some sudden shock, one hand on the air-pipe, to prevent it from becoming entangled in any object, the other hand on the life-line, in order to be ready to give the signal to draw up. If Robert's heart beat, it was not from fear, and he thought only of the Golden Fleece which he was going to win. But the dragon which Jason fought was less terrible than the sight which awaited the young diver in the sunken vessel.

Driven into the Gulf of Lyons by one of those storms which are so dangerous in the Mediterranean, the Sutlej had been thrown on her beam ends by a frightful sea, and almost every soul on board had perished. The fishermen had picked up among the rocks the mutilated bodies of sailors, who had tried to save themselves by swimming, but the greater part of the passengers had been sur-

prised by death in their cabins, and death had left them there. The treasure was guarded by corpses,

By the wan light which filtered through the shattered sides of the ship Robert saw them above him, around him, like floating phantoms. Some, lifted up by the sea, had clung to the ceiling with frantic grasp. Further on, a mother on her knees was still holding two children in her arms. Just as Robert was pushing aside with his hand the long loose tresses of a young girl which were floating around him, Disney saw that the young man was going to faint. He took hold of his arm and dragged him away.

The old diver threaded his way through this sombre maze with marvellous certainty. The gold had been deposited in a compartment situated beneath the captain's cabin. It was possible that the stern of the vessel would be deeply imbedded in the sand, and in this case all work would have been impossible, by reason of the obscurity, which would not have allowed them to discover and drag out the cases of ingots. The contrary had happened, and the sea in accomplishing its work seemed to have been eager to further the plans of the divers.

The stern had struck on some rocks which had kept it raised up ; but towards the centre of the ship the keel had rested on a soft bottom, and the result had been that, the vessel being suspended by its two extremities, its back had broken with the weight of the cargo, whilst the poop remained high up. This discovery was a valuable one, and the divers profited by it. Armed each one with a lever, they demolished the cabin floor, and below them appeared intact ten moderately-sized cases. Each contained probably ingots to the value of ten thousand pounds sterling.

On this first visit they could only establish the presence of the treasure, but their wishes were realised beyond their best hopes, for the ship was splendidly situated to facilitate their work.

Standing on this mass of gold, which henceforward belonged to them, Robert and Disney shook hands and returned by the dismal way which they had already followed. Poor Robert shuddered with terror when he felt the contact of these poor bodies which floated at hazard, like the souls of little children wandering in the shades. When he ascended to the boat and they had taken his helmet off, he was so pale that Diego quite made up his mind that the treasure was lost. He questioned his brother-in-law by look and gesture, and his anxiety was evident. When he was reassured as to the result of the exploration, his face lighted up all at once, and Robert thought that the desire to be rich must lie very near to his heart, since he showed so much anxiety about the cases of gold and so little about his father's dangers.

That day, for the first time, a feeling of doubt arose in Robert's mind. It was as yet only a vague instinct. It was, perhaps, also one of those warnings which God sends us in such mysterious ways.

Nevertheless, this first day ended joyfully. Old Tom was quite

proud of having discovered a treasure for his dear children. He laughed, he sang, he jeered the insurance company, who had thought to take in an old sailor and who had been taken in themselves.

But although the success of the enterprise was assured, the carrying out of it was not less arduous and difficult. It was necessary, after having cut away the floor of the cabin, to raise successively each of the cases with levers, to roll them as far as the main hatchway by a series of delicate manœuvres, then to make them fast to a rope, and finally to watch that they were hoisted without coming in contact with any obstacles. Each of these operations would be a long one, and there were ten cases.

Thus it was a formidable task, and there was no time to lose, for a storm might alter the position of the ship, and ruin all their hopes at one blow. They began their work the very next day, with such ardour and such unanimity that the task was much facilitated. In less than a fortnight after the first descent one of the cases was hoisted up and found intact. Disney, like a prudent man, had arranged a means of transport in advance, for it was not to be thought of to keep such an enormous sum in a badly secured and badly guarded house. Accordingly he had chartered a large sailing vessel, which had been moored at a few cables'-lengths from the works. They took the precious freight on board, and Disney and Robert took it to Marseilles, where they exchanged it for drafts on Paris and London.

It was decided that they should proceed in the same way with the other cases.

Operations were carried on with unheard-of success, for the sea remained calm for nearly three months, and nothing happened to interrupt the work. About every fortnight Disney went to Marseilles, sometimes with Robert, sometimes with Diego, and each time his balance at the bank increased by a sum of ten thousand pounds sterling.

God had protected the divers, and old Disney blessed Him every evening with his children, whilst Ellen read a prayer in her solemn voice. He who had worked forty years to amass a modest independence encountered at once, at the end of his career, an enormous fortune, and he was in possession of this fortune now, and was certain of being able to leave it to his children.

What plans were made during the beautiful summer evenings, when the family met in the garden at home after a scorching day ! The silvery light of the moon shone above the trees ; the nightingale sang with its clear voice, and the young couples sometimes surprised themselves regretting that this magnificent country was not the one in which they were to live.

Each one had his dream.

Ellen and Robert thought of improving the cottage, and of buying near Whitstable a pretty place, and leading the quiet life of rich English farmers. Disney, without daring to say so, thought of

attempting some grand undertaking elsewhere, which should make him for ever famous in the history of his profession.

He loved to recall the history of Phipps, the bold diver, who, in the reign of Charles II., recovered seven millions from the submerged hold of a Spanish galleon, and whose descendants sit to-day in the House of Lords ; and he aspired to equal John Gann, the most famous searcher for submarine treasures of this century, who built at Whitstable with the gold recovered by him from the sea a whole street which is called to this day Dollar Street.

Diego expressed very different desires. Diego talked of going to live in Paris or London, and of leading a grand life there. The family was rich, and according to him riches should cause work to be dispensed with, unless they serve for vast speculations destined to increase them still further.

Ellen and Robert listened to him with a kind of terror ; but they comforted themselves with the thought that their father was alone master of his fortune, and the old diver appeared little disposed to inhabit a large town. As long as he lived they could always feel certain that the cottage would be the headquarters of the family, and that their sister would never leave them.

Poor Mary, for her part, expressed no wish. Entirely absorbed by her admiration for her husband, she seemed to have gone back to the days of her childhood. Her mind, far from developing, seemed to contract each day, and she forgot even the little which she had formerly known. Ellen blushingly confessed one day to Robert that her sister could no longer answer a letter. She had almost forgotten how to write. Her husband, however, did not seem at all uneasy about this inferiority, and when Robert ventured to refer to it, he said that women were quite clever enough already.

To tell the truth, Diego himself was much changed in manner and conversation. The poor engineer, without family and without fortune, saw opening up before him the prospects of an opulent existence, and his language was already that of an upstart. His conduct, however, had remained the same, at least in appearance. He showed still the same affection for his wife, the same friendship for Robert, and the same respect for Disney. Fortune had as yet only spoilt his manners.

Towards the beginning of autumn the recovery of the cases was completed. There still remained on the Sutlej a rich cargo of cotton, much damaged by the sea, but which, nevertheless, could be advantageously disposed of. Disney, who was not at all in a hurry to enter upon the enjoyment of his new riches, thought it best to remain until the sea had given up everything that it had taken.

This determination was agreeable to Robert, for he had become much attached to this beautiful country. Ellen had made herself beloved by all the peasants in the neighbourhood ; they called her the good English lady, and the poor for ten miles round knew her well.

The works had been several times visited by curious people who had been attracted by rumours of the undertaking. The Disney family had even been called upon to entertain at their modest abode the authorities of the department, and Ellen acquitted herself perfectly of this task.

In spite of their double quality of English people and searchers of treasure, the strangers had been the object of general good-will. Accordingly the idea of prolonging their stay was by no means displeasing to them.

Diego alone was very much vexed.

In his father-in-law's presence he did not dare to offer any open opposition ; but he asked permission to take no further part in the work, and as his help had never been of much use, Disney gave him leave to spend his time as he liked. At first he took one or two trips to Marseilles, then to begin to pass his days away from the house, sometimes in the woods, sometimes on the common which surrounded the *bastide*, but always alone.

He only returned home during the evening, and always worn out with fatigue, as if he had been engaged in some violent exercise. He did not go shooting ; he did not ride. What did he do ? No one seemed to trouble himself about it, except Robert, whom his singular behaviour inspired with vague disquietude. One day, towards the middle of November, Disney asked Robert Bird to go to Marseilles to arrange his business at his banker's, as he was in the habit of doing himself every month. The old man felt too weary to undertake the journey, and, besides, he wished to stop and hurry his workmen, for the bad time of year was approaching.

This time Diego proposed to accompany Robert. They had to go and wait for the coach at the village of Cogolin, which was about fifteen miles from their house, and the brothers-in-law went thus far on foot. On the morning of the next day they were at Marseilles.

Robert spent his day with the banker, who handed him over the accounts, which were perfectly in order, and which showed that his father-in-law's fortune exceeded one hundred thousand pounds. He dined at his house with Diego, who appeared to expand at the compliments which the banker did not spare upon their rapidly made fortune, and the following day the coach set them down, at about ten o'clock in the evening, in the village of Cogolin. There they were obliged to stop, not being able to procure a conveyance to take them home. They would have arrived there, in any case, in the middle of the night, and they thought it the wisest plan to have their supper and go to bed, so as to start early next morning. In the only inn which the village contained they were allotted two rooms adjoining one another, and which both opened out on a balcony fixed to the wall. From this balcony a flight of steps descended directly into the courtyard. Midnight had sounded when they had finished a hasty supper, and they retired to bed immediately.

Diego said that he was dropping with sleep, and Robert had no wish to sit up. He had, however, some difficulty in going to sleep, and he tossed about a long time before closing his eyes. Fatigue had no doubt excited his nerves, for the least sound caused him to wake with a start. Now he fancied he heard Diego's door open ; now it seemed to him that a cautious step was treading the balcony. Sleep had been so long coming that finally he fell off into such a deep one that it was daylight when he was awoke by the sound of Diego knocking against the partition which separated them. He was calling him a sluggard, and telling him to get up. Robert saw that it was past seven o'clock, and he hastened to dress. On entering Diego's room he found him just concluding that operation.

The conveyance had been ordered the evening before, and after a hasty breakfast the two brothers-in-law set out for home on one of those splendid mornings of the Provençal autumn, which are as hot as a summer's day in London. Robert talked little, but he was entirely absorbed with the joyful idea of seeing those whom he loved, and Diego, occupied, no doubt, by some such thought, did not speak a word.

It was about ten o'clock when the red roof of the *bastide* began to appear above the top of a clump of pine-trees which protected it on the north side.

Presently Robert fancied he saw a large and excited crowd at the front door. He seemed to recognise the blue shirts of Disney's workmen, and also the glitter of arms and some uniforms. Much surprised at this sight, for all the divers should have been at work at this hour, he questioned Diego, who said that he could see nothing.

He whipped up the horse, and in less than half an hour they were at the bottom of the hill. From here the travellers could no longer see the crowd ; but they had been perceived, for John Slough, the foreman, was running to meet them. He was hardly within earshot when Robert called out to him :

“What's the matter, John ? In heaven's name, what has happened ?”

But the sailor was too much out of breath to reply, and when he had arrived at the horse's head, it was with difficulty that he managed to say in a broken voice :

“Get out, Mister Robert, get out. You will learn the bad news only too soon.”

“An accident !” cried Robert.

He confessed afterwards that his first fear was for his dear Ellen. He had her name on his lips, and he did not dare to pronounce it ; but his doubt did not last long.

“Our master, our good master is dead,” replied Slough.

“Who ? My father ?”

Robert sprang from the trap, and rushed like a madman towards the house. He went so quickly that poor John could not keep up

with him, and he did not even think of Diego, who, paralysed, no doubt, by the shock, had not attempted to leave his place. The little courtyard in which the house stood was thronged by a crowd of his father's labourers and peasants from the neighbourhood, who bared their heads on seeing Robert, and made way for him to pass. Two policemen who were guarding the turret staircase recognised him probably, for they did not stop him.

Robert cleared the steps in three bounds, threw violently open the door of the bedroom, and fell on his knees on seeing the bleeding corpse of Thomas Disney.

The old sailor was lying stretched on his bed, and seemed to be asleep. A gaping wound appeared on the left side of his naked breast, but his honest face had retained its calm and gentle expression. He must have been taken by surprise.

Two men clothed in black, the doctor and the magistrate of the canton, were writing at a table. They rose, in order to endeavour to restrain Robert, but they could not prevent him from throwing himself on his father's body.

This effort was his last. The unhappy youth staggered and fell senseless.

When he opened his eyes again he was lying in his own bedroom, and Ellen was on her knees at his side, weeping. Robert threw himself into her arms and pressed her against his breast, as if he would have protected her against death who had just entered the house.

It was the most cruel moment of that fearful day. They mingled their tears and bent together under the first shock of their misfortune, like two children surprised by a storm.

John Slough came and drew his young master from this mournful embrace. The magistrate wished to speak to the son of the victim, and Robert followed the old sailor, who was weeping no less bitterly himself. The magistrate was waiting for Robert in the drawing-room. He was an excellent man, who often came to see them, and whom they all loved much. He clasped Robert's hand affectionately; but his face expressed sincere grief and at the same time a sort of uneasiness which the young man could not at first understand.

"Sir," said he, "I have a painful duty to perform here. I loved and respected your foster-father, and I sympathise deeply with you in your misfortune; but I am a magistrate and am obliged to seek the authors of an atrocious crime. Forgive me, then, for disturbing you in your grief in order to put some indispensable questions to you. Had Mr. Disney any enemies?"

"None, sir, that I know of. How could he have had any in a country where he was a stranger, and where he had done nothing but good?"

"I know that Mr. Disney was much beloved. But, amongst all these English workmen who came here with you to work at the

wreck, was there none whom you could suspect of having a grudge against your foster-father?"

"No, sir," replied Robert, without hesitation. "All our men are old servants who for many years have shared my father's dangers. He treated them as his children, and it is impossible for me to believe that amongst these good fellows there was a monster capable of assassinating his benefactor."

"I can hardly think so, either; but cupidity is an evil counsellor. It was known that Mr. Disney had large sums in his possession, and the gold taken from the Sutlej must have formed a treasure rich enough to tempt a man who has only his wages."

"It is impossible, sir," interrupted Robert eagerly. "All our workmen knew that the cases which contained the ingots had been taken to Marseilles. My father only kept by him enough for our daily expenses and the men's wages."

"But even this must have been a large sum. How much do you think Mr. Disney had by him?"

"I can't say exactly; but I am certain that it could not have been more than ten or twelve thousand francs."

"Where did he usually keep his money?"

"In a desk, the key of which he always carried on him, and where he also kept his papers. It is the one in his bedroom, by his bedside."

"This desk was found open," continued the magistrate slowly. "The key had been placed by your father on the table, and the assassin used it, for it still bears the marks of his bloody fingers. The papers have been disturbed. They were found in disorder, as if they had been hurriedly read; but they were left in the drawers. The money alone has disappeared, and your estimate was a correct one, for, according to a note in your father's handwriting, the desk should have contained eleven *rouleaux* of gold of one thousand francs each. It was, therefore, to steal this sum that the crime was committed."

"I cannot believe it, sir; or, at least, I cannot admit a single one of our men can have allowed himself to be tempted by this gold. Each one of them was promised by my father a share in his profits, and this share would have exceeded the sum which has disappeared."

"We found, in truth," continued the magistrate, "a calculation made by Mr. Disney, from which it would appear that his workmen had an interest in the salvage; but was this fact known to them?"

"Perfectly, sir. My father always acted thus. Our workmen were all partners, and the modest independence which they enjoy proceeds entirely from our former undertakings."

"Do you know," continued the magistrate, after a moment's silence, "what papers the desk contained?"

"Accounts with the Marseilles bankers, his agreement with the insurance company in London—"

"There was also a will. Did you know that?"

"A will! No, sir; my father never spoke to me of it."

"This will has not been found; but it has existed, for in a bundle of papers, which no doubt escaped the assassin's eyes, I have discovered a letter from your father which refers to it. Is it not possible that this will was deposited with a notary or a lawyer?"

"I know absolutely nothing about that," replied Robert, rather astonished at the magistrate so dwelling on this point. "I never had any conversation with my father upon his private affairs, unless it was with reference to the money paid into the bank at Marseilles."

"I believe you," said the magistrate; "but the recovery of this will is most important. Did your brother-in-law know more about Mr. Disney's affairs than you?"

"I do not think so. Diego has always been in the dark as to money matters, like myself: more than myself, perhaps, for lately he had ceased to take any interest in the salvage operations."

"If I insist," continued the magistrate, "it is because my duty compels me to do so. You have just assured me that your workmen are innocent of the murder, and I am disposed to believe it; but who, then, committed it? Are we to believe that Mr. Disney was struck down by some passing assassin, by some convict escaped from Toulon, tempted by the darkness and by the loneliness of your house? Must we, on the contrary, think that some motive unknown to us armed the murderer's hand? This crime may be due to some facts of which we are ignorant, to some circumstance in your father's past life, perhaps. Be good enough, then, my good sir, to tell me all you know. My confidence in you and in your frankness is absolute. It is not a magistrate who is talking to you, it is a friend who is deeply grieved at your father's fearful death, and who would willingly avenge it."

Much touched by this language, Robert took the hand which the worthy magistrate held out to him, and, striving to restrain his tears, he began to tell him the short and simple story of his life.

This tale visibly affected the magistrate. He listened with the most scrupulous attention, and only interrupted it to ask for information about the origin of Diego's family.

When Robert came to the last days spent with his father, and the fatal journey during which Disney had been murdered, the questions became more precise. He begged the young man to give him an account, without omitting the slightest particular, of the employment of his time since his departure from home. This was easy. Robert had spent the first day at Marseilles, in the offices of Messrs. Garcin & Crozet, bankers. In the evening he had dined at their house with Diego. The next day had been passed in the Saint-Tropez coach, and at night, that terrible night during which Disney had been murdered, the two brothers-in-law had slept peacefully at the inn at Cogolin.

Voice and strength failed Robert at the end of this recital, and

the magistrate respected his grief. His last question was to ask him what had induced them to halt at a few miles' distance from home, instead of continuing their journey the same night. Robert had no difficulty in explaining how at midnight they had not been able to find a conveyance in a little village where the means of transport are few.

Worn out with fatigue and grief after this long ordeal, he went to join Ellen, whom he found at prayer. She was no longer weeping, and her anxious face bore traces of an inward struggle. She came to meet her husband and clasped his hand, saying :

"I must live, Robert, live for my sister ; for Mary has now only us in the world."

Her voice was calm ; but her eyes shone with extraordinary fire, and Robert read on her face a firm resolution which struck him with astonishment. For his own part, far from being in a condition to act, or even to think, he soon yielded to that dejection which always follows great grief. A violent fever succeeded this period of depression, and, thanks to this crisis, he escaped the mournful ordeal which the other inhabitants of the *bastide* had to undergo.

The law was taking its course with all its slow and minute forms. John Slough, who shared with Ellen the task of nursing Robert, told him the details of the crime and the steps which followed the inquiry. It was a gloomy mystery.

He had been the first to see his murdered master. Every one in the house was asleep when, at about six o'clock in the morning, he had gone to call Disney. The key was in the door as usual.

After having knocked without receiving any answer, John Slough had entered, and had started back with horror. The old sailor had, however, retained sufficient presence of mind to spare Ellen and Mary this sight. He had first of all called the two maids, and had sent them to inform his companions and then to fetch the magistrate and the police. He had afterwards had the courage to tell the fearful news to his master's daughters.

When Robert and Diego arrived the police had already had time to take some preliminary steps. Thomas Disney had been killed during his sleep by one blow from a dagger, which had reached his heart. The assassin must have noiselessly opened the door, gently approached the bed, struck with unerring hand, opened the desk with the key placed on the table, and fled with the gold.

The murder and theft must have been committed in the space of a very few minutes. It was to be concluded from this rapidity and certainty of execution that the assassin knew the room and his victim's habits. As a matter of fact, it did not appear that he had made use of a light. Thus he must have been obliged, by the doubtful light of the moon, which was then in its last quarter, to select from a bunch of keys that of the desk, then to open it and search the drawers.

Disney must have died without uttering a cry, for one of the

maids, who had lain awake for a greater part of the night, declared that she had heard nothing.

The murderous weapon had not been found ; but to judge from the shape of the wound the assassin must have used a knife with a very sharp and narrow blade. Slough, who was not at all fond of the French, did not cease to insist that the murderer was a native ; and that he must have known the country perfectly, to have approached the house in the middle of the night, and to have disappeared so suddenly afterwards.

He said, and not without reason, that the forests which cover the mountains on this little-frequented coast served as hiding-places for convicts escaped from Toulon, and that, in addition to this, the half-wild peasants of this out-of-the-way canton were quite capable of endeavouring to appropriate by means of a crime the treasure which they thought was hidden in Disney's house.

He was surprised that any one should have dared to suspect his comrades, of whom he was as certain as he was of himself. All the workmen had had to submit to a minute examination of their property and persons, and the ways of the French police exasperated the good sailor. His indignation knew no bounds when he found that an inquiry had been set on foot with the evident object of making certain that the story of the journey to Marseilles was correct. Diego had undergone a long examination, as well as the landlord and servants of the inn at Cogolin. Robert could not conceal from himself that the thought of imputing the crime to himself and his brother-in-law had occurred to the magistrate ; but he learnt at the same time that all the witnesses had agreed in declaring that Diego and he had gone to bed after midnight, and that the next day at seven o'clock they were still there. From the village of Cogolin to the *bastide* was more than twenty miles, and common sense showed the impossibility of going and returning on foot in six hours.

Now, in the whole district there was only one available conveyance, the one which had brought them back the next morning. For one of the travellers to be guilty, it would have been necessary for him to have flown.

Robert with difficulty found an explanation for those suspicions ; but by dint of reflection he saw that, in reality, if the crime had any other object than that of murder, Diego and he were the only persons interested in poor Tom's death.

Disney was rich ; his enormous fortune, so rapidly acquired, must all come to his daughters, and it was possible to suppose that the desire to enjoy it more quickly had armed the coveteous son-in-law's hand.

Robert explained to himself thus the embarrassment of the magistrate, his questions as to the past, his allusions to the existence of a will which had disappeared. On the other hand, the worthy magistrate had shown him too much kindness and sympathy. It was impossible that he could seriously suspect him.

Was it, then, Diego whom he accused ?

This thought shocked Robert, for although his brother-in-law's conduct had often appeared to him strange, he had never surprised, either in his acts or in his words, anything which justified such a terrible suspicion. Besides, he learned from Slough that Diego's grief was so acute that after having been examined he had shut himself up in his room and had refused even to be consoled by his wife.

On the third day the law had concluded its task, and Disney's children were allowed to bury their father. In spite of the state of his health, Robert was determined to be present at the funeral. And, in truth, it was imperative that he should, for Diego in his turn had fallen ill, and Robert was the only one, of all the children that he had loved, to follow the remains of Thomas Disney to the grave. It was a touching ceremony.

The cemetery where the old sailor was to sleep for ever was more than three miles from the *bastide*. Relays of his faithful workmen carried him on their shoulders, and the whole population of the neighbourhood piously followed the procession.

The old magistrate walked at Robert's side, and when the last farewell was said to Disney at the mouth of the grave, it was he who received the unfortunate young man in his arms and took him back to Ellen. The brave woman had not been able to leave her sister in order to follow her father to the grave ; but she had not allowed any one to perform the last sad duties towards him, and her hands alone had shrouded his bloody corpse. She cheered her husband by her energy, and poor Robert gathered from her example enough courage to question the magistrate, whom he had not seen since the terrible morning of the crime. The good man shook his head sadly, and told them that they had learnt nothing to throw any light on the dreadful mystery.

To tell the truth, the case was no longer in his hands. Numerous witnesses had been examined, but not one of them had been able to give any useful information. No one had seen or heard anything on that fatal night ; no one, with the single exception of an old shepherd, who was tending his goats five or six miles from the *bastide*, at a place where the path which runs into the high-road to Marseilles passes between two steep rocky banks. This man said that he had been aroused, as he lay asleep on a wooded height, by a sound which resembled the rolling of wheels, but which had appeared to him lighter—"thinner," as he said. Upon this he had looked down on the road, and had seen an object which puzzled him vastly. It was, he said, half wheel and half man, and it travelled as quickly as a will-o'-the-wisp.

This strange apparition had so frightened him that he shut his eyes, convinced that the devil alone could travel about the country in the middle of the night on such a machine. An hour afterwards the sound had recommenced, and the same fantastic object had passed beneath him, but in the opposite direction. The first time

the man—if it was a man—was going towards the sea ; the second time he was returning from thence. Although odd, his evidence had seemed to merit attention, and the shepherd had been examined several times, but nothing more definite had been extracted from him. As a matter of fact, the man was supposed to be rather wrong in his head. He gave himself out to be a sorcerer, and was always ready to tell ghost-stories. His veracity was questioned, and as no one came forward to confirm his singular evidence, he was finally sent about his business, after having been severely rated for his absurd vision.

The magistrate seemed inclined to think that his colleague had been wrong not to attach more importance to this story ; but he did not himself know exactly what to believe, and, besides, his superiors thought that this mysterious affair was only a vulgar crime inspired by greed. This was, in truth, the most natural explanation, and Robert finally adopted it.

But his mind was soon fully occupied by the cares which devolved on him. Thomas Disney's death placed his two daughters in possession of a considerable fortune, and Robert, for the first time in his life, found himself face to face with the troubles and anxieties which money always brings with it. The greater part of this fortune was immediately realisable, since it consisted in cash deposited with the Marseilles bankers. As far as this was concerned, it was only necessary to carry out a few formalities at the English Consulate ; but the property which Disney had left at Whitstable remained to be thought of. It was important, at the same time, to conclude the salvage operations, for the cargo of the *Sutlej* still represented a considerable sum.

On the first conversation which Robert had on this subject with Diego, he saw that his brother-in-law wished to leave the *bastide* as soon as possible. For his own part, he was quite of a different way of thinking. A sad charm attached him to this house where he had borne such cruel sufferings. It seemed to him almost wicked to abandon that nook of ground where poor old Tom would soon rest all alone, far from all those whom he had loved.

Ellen shared his feelings, and it was agreed that they should remain at the *bastide* until the conclusion of the work, whilst Diego went to England to settle the affairs of the family. Mary, who had no will but that of her husband, consented to remain with her sister.

Before separating, all the occupants of the *bastide* were to go together to Marseilles to settle accounts with the bank. As soon as the indispensable formalities were concluded, Diego started, and Robert returned home with Ellen and Mary.

Solitude is suited to great grief, and they looked forward without alarm to the months which they were about to pass in this wild country. They needed to recover themselves before entering upon town life again. Ellen was about to become a mother ; the child which was soon to be born would absorb the attention of its father

and mother. They wished to profit by the time during which they were still together to elevate the mind of their dear Mary to her new position, and to try and imbue it with the reason and will which it still lacked.

And besides this, their life at the *bastide* was full of charm for them. The misfortune which had afflicted them had brought them much sympathy, and they saw rather more people than before. The good magistrate was among this number, and he informed his young friends that the inquiry had led to no result. The most active search, the arrest of suspicious travellers, domiciliary visits to peasants of bad character, all had been fruitless.

The certainty that the murderer must have immediately crossed the frontier had gradually taken possession of the magistrates' minds, and the police were insensibly arriving at that period of indifference when the efforts of the law slacken, before stopping altogether for want of proofs.

Sometimes, when his presence at the works was not indispensable, Robert went with Ellen and Mary to pray at their father's grave. The distance was rather long, but the walk was a splendid one on the lovely winter days, when the sun gilded the jagged cliffs of the coast, and made them stand out in bold relief against the sombre background of pine forest. Often, too, Robert went alone for long walks in the forest, and he was never weary of admiring the vigour of nature in this southern land, so different from the cloudy skies under which he had been born.

One day, when he had been overtaken by darkness on one of these excursions, he left the road in order to gain the *bastide* by cutting across a common covered with clumps of great pine-trees, which are found all along the coast of Provence. Night was coming on, and Robert was hastening his steps, when he struck his foot so violently against a large stone that he fell. On getting up, he saw that the shock had displaced the stone, and he espied an object which was shining in the last rays of the setting sun. He bent down, and saw that it was a tin box. Much surprised at this find, he lifted the box, which appeared to him very heavy, and opened it. It contained *rouleaux* of gold wrapped in a greyish envelope, and a paper, which Robert hastened to unfold. A mist passed before his eyes. He recognised Disney's handwriting. It was his will.

It only contained a few lines. Thomas Disney left the whole of his fortune to his daughter Ellen, on condition that she made his other daughter, Mary, an allowance equal to the half of the income derived from the whole of his property.

This document bore a recent date. It was signed and perfectly regular, for the English law allows parents much greater freedom in the disposal of their fortunes than that of France. The motives which had prompted it were clear. Disney, uneasy at Mary's weakness, had wished to protect her against Diego's influence, and he had placed his fortune under the care of Ellen, whose firmness he knew.

But who had hidden this accusing document? A terrible idea flashed across Robert's mind, and he was afraid that he had guessed the truth. One man only in the world was interested in the disappearance of Disney's will, and that man was—Diego. He alone could have thrown away this gold, which he had doubtless only carried off in order to avert suspicion. All these thoughts traversed Robert's brain like a flash of lightning, but he drove them away at once.

"What!" said he, "what are foolish suspicions against the evidence? Did Diego, whom I am accusing, leave me during that fatal night? By what extraordinary power could he have committed the most cowardly of crimes at the *bastide* and have returned before daybreak to the room which adjoined mine? May not the murderer have carried off the will solely because it was in the same box as the gold? Who knows whether he did not bury his treasure there in order to come and recover it later? And, besides, if it was Diego, would he not have burnt the will?"

This last proof seemed to Robert a decisive one, and he felt that a weight had been removed from off his chest when he was able to say to himself that his brother-in-law was innocent.

By this time it was quite dark. Robert still held in his hands the terrible box, and he had not yet thought of the use which he was going to make of it. The first idea that occurred to him was to hand it over to the police; but he thought of the suspicions aroused again, and the searches resumed with fresh ardour. Was he certain of the direction which the pursuit would take, and must he run the terrible risk of seeing Diego accused? Robert resolved to keep silence.

The gold which the murderer's bloody hands had touched filled him with horror. His first impulse was to throw it far from him on the common, but he changed his mind, and placed the box under the stone, which he carefully replaced. He thought to himself that the murderer, whoever he was, would return to visit his hidden treasure, and that he could be watched. He had kept the will, so he had no reason to fear that the murderer would come to remove and destroy it; but he did not intend to make any use of it, for fear of awakening the suspicions of the police. He thought that the best thing to do was to wait, in order to act according to circumstances, and even to refrain from telling Ellen of the discovery. Robert returned to the *bastide*, endeavouring to conceal his perturbed state of mind.

A letter from Diego had just arrived. It was dated from Paris. It stated that he had concluded his business in England, and that he would already have been in Provence if it had not been for his uncle's unexpected return. This uncle, the one who had taken charge of him during his childhood, had decided to come to Europe to enjoy a fortune made in recent commercial operations. He was going to reside in Paris, and he was very anxious that his nephew should live in the same country as himself. Diego concluded by

saying that he was disposed to conform to this desire, and that he was occupied in preparing in Paris an establishment in keeping with the new position of the family. He expressed, at the same time, a most lively wish never to separate himself from his brother-in-law.

Diego's proposal overturned Robert and Ellen's dearest projects. They had dreamt of living happily and peaceably in the cottage at Whitstable, where they had loved one another. To give up this life in order to follow Diego into the whirl of life in a large capital, was for them the hardest of sacrifices. But poor Mary was accustomed for another to think and act for her. To leave her was to deliver her over entirely to the domination of her husband. Ellen did not hesitate.

"We promised our father," she said to her husband. And the same evening their resolution was taken. The salvage operations were finished. Robert took measures for the welfare of the workmen, and sent them back to England. It was not without emotion that he separated from these good fellows. For their part, they left their master with regret, and the foreman, John Slough, could not make up his mind to go. He had no family, and he asked leave to finish his days with Robert, who was glad to keep him.

Diego soon followed his letter. He arrived at the *bastide* one evening as Ellen was reading prayers. They had not expected him so soon, and Robert experienced a curious sensation on seeing him. His appearance evoked certain recollections, and Ellen shared the same indefinable feeling as her husband. Mary alone showed only joy. She received Diego with the naïve delight of a child, and Diego showed himself tender and attentive towards her. He was radiant. His elegant dress, his easy manners, and his careless conversation, astonished the occupants of the *bastide*. His face beamed with the satisfaction of a man who feels himself master of life, and who sees the world opening before him like a subjugated country. Robert sought in vain upon his features some traces of the emotion which he might well have felt. The past was already forgotten.

Diego related his voyages and his plans. He had taken a house in Paris large enough to lodge the two couples. His uncle had taken charge of the furnishing of it, and all was to be ready in a few days' time. Whilst he was describing the splendours of this new life, Robert exchanged a mournful glance with Ellen. But they had no serious objection to his plans, since they had determined not to leave Mary. Their departure was fixed for the day after the next. They wished to devote their last day to visiting their father's grave, and Robert set out for the village with Ellen and Mary. Diego, fatigued with the long voyage which he had just made, remained at home. Robert went at the same time to bid adieu to the good magistrate, who received him most cordially, and told him that the mystery of Disney's death had not been cleared up, and most probably never would be.

"There are crimes," said he, shaking his young friend's hand,

"that God reserves to Himself to punish, because man has no chastisement proportioned to their atrocity."

These words touched Robert deeply. They aroused in his mind the terrible doubts that had assailed him at first ; it seemed to him that the magistrate had pronounced a sentence decreed by Providence. He returned home overcome with the weight of so many sad emotions, and once more he crossed the common. In spite of himself it occurred to him that Diego, by remaining behind them, had perhaps wished to give himself time to visit his hiding-place. But the stone did not appear to have been moved. The box was in the same place, and still contained the *rouleaux* of gold. Robert thrust it more deeply into the ground, replaced the stone, and walked quickly away.

Next day, when the carriage which was bearing them away rounded the foot of the hill, and the red tiles of the *bastide* disappeared behind the tall trees, the tears came into poor Robert's eyes. He could not help thinking of the other journey, during which misfortune had come upon him. The road which they were following reminded him of the fearful morning, and when they stopped at that same inn at Cogolin, where he had slept whilst Disney was being murdered, the terrible recollection overpowered him. Diego himself was impressed, for he became suddenly silent, and Robert thought better of him for his grief. The next morning the family were at Marseilles, and the day was employed in settling their business with the banker.

Disney had left nearly three million francs, which were paid over to the heirs in two drafts on Paris, for Diego wished that the money should be shared immediately.

In the presence of this enormous fortune Robert was almost afraid. The crime which had placed it in his hands constantly haunted his mind, and he felt almost impious for daring to touch the money before having avenged his murdered father. The future loomed before him almost as gloomily as the present, and Ellen needed all her energy to put a little courage into him. Fortunately, the cares and worries which followed their arrival in Paris aided in diverting his mind. Robert had agreed, not without secret repugnance, to inhabit for the time being the house taken by Diego. This house, situated in the then almost deserted neighbourhood of Petite-Pologne, stood in the middle of a garden. The rooms were sumptuously furnished. Three carriages and six horses occupied the stables, and numerous liveried servants filled the ante-rooms. Robert could not understand how an establishment so complete in every particular had been set up in such a short time ; but Diego told him that his uncle had himself superintended the workmen, and had taken charge of all the preparations. The house was very well adapted to contain two families, for it consisted of a main building flanked by two wings, of which each contained a complete suite of apartments.

Diego did the honours of the house ; but neither Robert nor Ellen was in a state of mind favourable to appreciate all this luxury, and they regretted the rustic appointments of the *bastide*. As for Mary, she opened her great eyes and showed a childish delight.

The first few days were taken up by various occupations. The first thing to be thought of was the investment of the fortune left by Disney, and Diego manifested his intention of separating his portion from that of his brother-in-law. Having without difficulty obtained an authorisation, he drew Mary's share from the agent of the Marseilles banker, and he informed no one of the use to which he proposed to put this money. Upon this Robert's scruples rose more than once. He reproached himself for this weakness, and he was tempted to make use of the will which a singular chance had put in his hands ; but he could never make up his mind to revive the horrible remembrance of the gold hidden on the common.

The arrival of Diego's uncle diverted his perplexed mind. He had been away for a few days, and he returned during the week after they had moved into their house. He was a man of about forty. His tall stature and broad shoulders denoted uncommon strength. His sunburnt complexion showed that he had long resided in hot climates, and his black, curly hair would even have led one to think that he had African blood in his veins. His features, however, had no resemblance to those of a negro. They were regular, and their usual expression was one of imperturbable composedness. They became animated only when he laughed and showed his sharp, white teeth. His eyes sparkled then with sharpness and cunning. It was easy to see that this man could employ the craft of a savage and a will of iron in the satisfaction of his passions. His manner bore no trace of the usual brusqueness of a sailor. He appeared, on the contrary, to be quite at home with the best society, and his presence terrified Robert beyond measure.

He introduced himself with perfect self-possession, and explained in a few well-chosen words his reason for coming to live with his nephew after such a long absence. His name was Richard Morgan, and Diego's mother was his sister. Born in the island of Trinity, and having no means beyond his post of captain in the merchant service, he had been with regret obliged to part from his nephew, who had been left an orphan at an early age, and he had sent him with a very small allowance to be educated in England.

A few years before his luck had changed. The fortunate discovery of an island containing gold had suddenly made him a rich man, and, without entirely giving up the sea, Morgan had decided to settle in France with his only surviving relative. It was a difficult matter to meet such polite advances rudely, and Robert felt that he was already pledged in spite of himself. Ellen, who shared his instinctive repugnance, had to yield also, and, for the time being at least, they had to resign themselves to a life in common.

Morgan had appropriated to himself the second floor, and he was very reserved towards the young people. The two families lived as it were apart under the same roof. At night only they met together at the same table, and no one could have imagined, who was present at the meal, that a secret antipathy divided the guests.

From the very first, Diego took pains to obtain an entry into Parisian society, which is always especially gracious to rich foreigners. It appeared as if this life of luxury and pleasure was his natural element, and that he had passed his life in presiding at sumptuous dinners or organising splendid *fêtes*.

The state of Ellen's health obliged her to keep at a distance from this boisterous life, and Robert himself gradually withdrew from company with whom he felt out of place. Besides this, he had other views. Idleness began to pall on him, and he was ashamed to leave off work at an age when, as a rule, a man is just beginning his career. Trade was improving in France, and Robert thought that he could utilise his knowledge acquired under the guidance of a clever English engineer. In the course of the first year he found an opportunity for employing his time and capital in some works which had just started outside Paris. He soon held an important position there, and became enamoured of the occupation—at that time a new one—of making locomotives. Diego's sarcasm did not spare his brother-in-law when he heard of his resolution, which was quite unworthy, he said, of the position which his fortune assigned to him in the world, and Morgan, with more reserve, hinted that he might invest his capital more profitably in certain maritime operations.

But Robert's character had become firmer, and he troubled himself the less about these objections that his dear Ellen fully approved of the course he had taken.

Whilst he was thus providing for himself a life in conformity with his tastes, the courageous woman was performing the task which she had set herself. To watch over her sister, guide her feeble mind, strengthen her mental faculties—such was her every moment's care. Mary, it is true, seemed to be happy, and had accepted her new life with cheerful indifference. The *fêtes*, the promenades, the dresses amused her as dolls had formerly done, and she loved her husband almost as children love those who give them pretty toys.

The first year passed rapidly, and the sad recollections of the *bastide* were beginning to fade away when Ellen gave birth to a son. The immense joy which filled Robert's heart caused him almost to forget his fears and anxieties. The feeling that he was a father carried them off altogether. All his thoughts were devoted to the child that God had sent him, and he was seized with an eager desire to be alone with his happiness. Morgan, Diego, Mary herself had ceased to concern him, and the hours which the life in common obliged him to devote to them seemed to him to be stolen from his son.

He had no difficulty in persuading Ellen to separate from Diego.

He bought, on the top of the hill of Montmartre, a house surrounded by a vast garden planted with venerable trees. They had the advantage of pure air and a splendid view. It was a country house in Paris, and the young couple had the further advantage of not being far removed from Mary.

John Slough, who had never consented to live in the house at Petite-Pologne, joyfully accepted a home in the new abode, and took upon himself to organise there a modest but comfortable establishment. He sent to England for faithful servants, and a short time after Ellen's confinement the young couple took possession of their little castle.

The separation was effected without difficulty, and Robert even fancied that it was secretly agreeable to his brother-in-law. Diego was now in the full swing of worldly existence, which absorbs the whole mind and time. The retired life that Robert led with his wife in a corner of this noisy house was almost a standing reproach, and by taking their departure they left the course clear for pleasures which they did not wish to share. Apart from this dissimilarity in their tastes, Robert had no fault to find either with Diego or his uncle. One thing only troubled the young man, viz., the reckless expenditure in the house; but he had had at that time too little experience of Parisian life to realise the chasm which was being hollowed out at his side. It was his belief, however, that Morgan possessed a large fortune, and that he contributed liberally towards the common expenses. Very different was the life of Robert and Ellen in their peaceable retreat at Montmartre. Robert had thrown his whole soul into his work, and he devoted himself to it with a zeal which was soon rewarded by the most successful results. The young couple lived in luxury, and yet their fortune, already far too large for their simple tastes, was increasing every day. They saw but little society: engineers, merchants, and a few school friends. Mary had got into the habit of coming every day to pass a few hours with her sister. Ellen and Robert thanked God who had bestowed such happiness upon them; but their joy, their pride, was their son, their George, who had arrived at the age when a child lisps out his first words.

Every year they took a trip to Whitstable, and it was a treat to them to see the good sailors who owed to poor Disney the rest which they enjoyed in their old days. This happiness, the most perfect that man can enjoy in this world, was fated to vanish like a dream. The fatal hour was approaching, and fresh catastrophes were about to wreck the unhappy Robert's life.



X.

As he pronounced this last sentence, which foretold the recital of events more terrible still, the chaplain's voice trembled, and his strength seemed to fail him. The president requested him to take some rest, and announced that the court would rise for an hour. At that time the room presented a most extraordinary spectacle. An attentive crowd palpitated beneath the priest's words, and curiosity had given way to profound emotion, which had affected judge and jury alike.

The prisoner, bowed down on his seat, shuddered at times at these sympathising accents, and when he raised his eyes towards his noble defender, great tears were seen rolling down his wan cheeks. The young barristers appointed to defend the prisoners listened with deep interest to this clear and simple story, and were astounded at this new eloquence which, scorning all oratorical artifices, was able to touch all hearts.

In order that nothing should be lacking to complete the strangeness of this *tableau*, the Arabs remained as a living contrast in the midst of this affecting scene. Mute, immovable, and sombre, their eyes fixed on the president, of whom their savage's instinct guessed the power, the two sons of the desert awaited their fate with the stoicism of the Indian bound to the stake. But the man upon whom all eyes were fixed was the generous Abbé Guérin, who, in order to save an unfortunate man, threw his whole soul into his speech, as he had formerly given his blood for the confession of his faith.

Hardly had he ceased speaking, hardly had he sat down, pale and overcome with fatigue, when a presentiment entered the minds of all. Had not this priest, who was relating in persuasive language the prisoner's history, had his share in Robert's misfortunes? Would he not presently mingle with this mournful story the history of his own broken life and torn heart?

Gasping with impatience and anxiety, the spectators hardly exchanged a few words in low tones. The magnitude of their sensations had transfigured the crowd. It did not speak, it did not move; it waited. When, after an interval of an hour and a half, the president announced that the sitting was resumed, an electric quiver ran through the whole room. Pale but firm, like a man who is about to perform a painful duty, the chaplain rose, and his grave voice once more resounded in the midst of the most profound silence.

* * * * *

Happiness cannot be described, and the glad days which Robert passed in this house at Montmartre will play no part in this story.

Fifteen years had elapsed since Thomas Disney's mysterious death, and great changes had taken place in the brilliant house in the Petite-Pologne. Morgan no longer inhabited it but from time to time. He went away every year, and did not return sometimes until after a seven or eight months' interval. He was obliged, he said, to go and superintend the gold-digging in the mysterious island that he had discovered for himself, and his expeditions seemed to be profitable, for his return was always remarkable for increased luxury and extravagance.

Diego had become the centre of a group of debauchees, almost all foreigners, who astonished Paris by their sumptuous eccentricities. As for Mary, she still enjoyed complete liberty and continued to visit her sister. She spoke but little of her home ; but nothing led one to suppose that she was not happy. The worldly life that she was obliged to lead occupied her too much to leave her any time for reflection, and her indolent nature accommodated itself perfectly to a negative happiness. Robert had almost entirely broken off his relations with Diego, but, upon more than one occasion, in the quiet company which he affected, he had heard some echoes of the rumours which were circulated with regard to his brother-in-law.

Public opinion was not favourable to Diego, and Morgan's existence was especially the subject of ill-natured comment. Many people attributed his riches to a source infinitely less creditable than the gold mine of which he talked ceaselessly. It had been noticed that his wealth was, so to speak, intermittent. His expenditure would gradually decrease, and he would then disappear for a few months, to return more brilliant than ever ; but no one ever knew at what port he embarked, nor what crew manned the ship which took him to the inexhaustible island. At that point remarks ceased, in Robert's presence ; but John Slough had more than once heard very awkward insinuations. People did not hesitate to allude before him to the enormous profits to be derived from smuggling, especially when supplemented by piracy. The old sailor could not conceal from his master the damage these rumours were likely to have on Diego, whose intimacy with Morgan became every day more close.

Fears arose in Robert's mind. He thought again of making use of the will which the strangest chance had brought into his hands, and he came to the conclusion that it was time for him to act.

During the summer Mary stayed with Diego and Morgan in a country-house on the banks of the Seine, near Saint-Ouen. She drove into Paris almost every day, and passed a few hours with Ellen and Robert.

One evening in August she left them about nine o'clock to return to Saint-Ouen in a brougham driven by a Moorish coachman whom Morgan had brought back from one of his voyages. Her visit had been a long one, and never had Mary appeared gayer. Ellen had given her as usual a French lesson, a language which the poor girl could talk pretty well, but which she had great difficulty in writing.

These lessons appeared, however, to amuse and interest her, and that day particularly she had not ceased to talk of her husband's good-nature, who passed an hour every day in dictating to her, and making her copy entire pages.

The next day, as he was at the works, where he remained as a rule all day, Robert was much surprised to see one of Diego's servants arrive at full speed in a carriage, with a pressing letter from his master.

"My dear Robert," wrote Diego, "on returning to Saint-Ouen yesterday, Mary got out of the carriage on the road which runs along the banks of the Seine, about a mile from the house. She told the coachman to go home without her, as she wished to walk. I had been in Paris, too, and when I arrived here about midnight she had not appeared. I set out at once to look for her, and passed the night with my servants in scouring the country in all directions. It is mid-day now, and no one has discovered the least trace of her. I should not have told you, in order to spare you an anxiety which is perhaps unnecessary, but a note which I have just discovered makes me fear the worst. Come, I entreat, without losing a moment."

This letter terrified Robert in the highest degree, and he hastened to get into the carriage. On arriving at Saint-Ouen he was met by Morgan, whose face betokened an amount of grief which was too apparent to be sincere. Robert would have questioned him, but he could hardly reply, and took him to his brother-in-law. Diego was seated, his head resting on his hands, in an attitude of the deepest grief. He held out his hand to Robert in silence, and showed him a piece of paper on the table. It was a sheet of foolscap, similar to that which Mary used for her lessons. Robert read the following words, traced in an awkward hand, which was indeed that of his unfortunate sister-in-law: "I ask God's forgiveness for taking my life. My body will be found in the Seine. I wish to be buried in the white dress which I wore on my wedding-day."

If a thunderbolt had fallen at Robert's feet it could not have astounded him more. Mary, who had left them the day before so happy, so gay, Mary talking of dying ! Was it credible ? Was it possible ? And yet these painfully formed letters, this childish writing, were indeed hers. Robert could not mistake it ; he had so often seen her writing, as Ellen dictated to her French sentences, of which the poor girl had always such difficulty in understanding the meaning. His brother-in-law's voice recalled him to his senses.

"Ever since yesterday," said Diego, sadly, "we have searched ; the river has been dragged, but we have found nothing, nothing!"

"But it is impossible !" cried Robert ; "Mary has not taken her life ! Why should she wish to die ? You must send to Paris, inform the police, anything."

Diego shook his head and replied :

"I have not waited till now to try this last resource. The police have been informed ; they have found nothing."

And he resumed his grief-stricken attitude.

An idea suddenly occurred to Robert. Perhaps, yielding to a childish caprice, such as she had sometimes had, Mary had returned to her sister's. She had lost her way, and, fearing to be scolded by her husband, she was awaiting her brother-in-law at Montmartre. Without more ado Robert threw himself into the carriage which had brought him, and told the coachman to take him back to Paris as fast as his horse could gallop. Diego let him go, without trying to take this last hope from him ; but it was easy to see from his face that he did not share it. In order to believe in it himself, Robert must have forgotten the fatal letter he had just read ; but he had lost his head to such a degree that he did not even think of the terrible blow that he was about to inflict on Ellen.

On arriving at the gate of the garden at Montmartre he thought he saw Mary sitting on the terrace at her sister's side, at the foot of a tall elm-tree, which was her favourite place. The fancy was short-lived.

Ellen was alone. On seeing her husband's agitation and paleness, her first thought was of her son.

“In heaven's name, what has happened to George ?”

And when Robert had by a gesture reassured her, she rose erect and motionless as a statue.

“Then it is Mary,” she said, in a hollow voice. With one word she had shattered the frail building of her husband's hopes, and Robert's emotion was so intense that he had hardly the strength to tell her the fearful news. She listened, without saying a word ; then she fell on her knees and began to pray. When she rose her eyes were dry.

“My sister is dead,” said she in a hard voice, “and we could have saved her. May God forgive us ! I have just besought Him not to punish us through our child.”

Robert did not dare to attempt to fathom these despairing words, and he was clasping her in his arms and weeping, when Morgan's Moor appeared. The man had ridden at full speed, without succeeding in overtaking them. All uncertainty had ceased. Half-an-hour after Robert left Saint-Ouen poor Mary's body had been found in the Seine. The roots of a willow tree had caught her dress, which had appeared on the surface of the water, and the body had rested on the banks of a little island, whither the current had carried it. Diego sent word to his brother-in-law to return immediately, and Robert was preparing to follow the Moor, when Ellen grasped his arm, and said firmly :

“Remain here, and send that man away.”

Diego's messenger understood, no doubt, for he went off immediately, muttering in that curious *patois* which Orientals call the Frankish language.

“Me, *sabir*, me, *andar*, Sidi Robert not come, *lella Ellena tenir malo*.”

He saluted them, by placing his hand on his heart, and went.

"By the memory of my basely assassinated father," said Ellen ; "by the name of our son George, swear to me that you will never again look upon the monster who has killed our sister."

Then her colour went, her arms dropped at her sides, her eyes became fixed, and she fell. Her swoon was a long one, and when she recovered her senses delirium seized her. The names of Mary, of Diego, and of George, were constantly on her lips, in the midst of incoherent phrases. The doctors recognised the commencement of brain fever, and ordered perfect rest.

Robert was completely crushed. One hour had been sufficient to plunge him into a bottomless abyss, and for several days he thought he should go mad. He took his post at Ellen's bedside, and the sad care of nursing her spared him at least the cruel moments which he would have passed at Saint-Ouen. John Slough, who took upon himself the task of replacing him at Diego's side, brought him details which filled up the measure of his grief.

Mary's funeral had been attended by an immense crowd. She was adored in the village, and the poor had wept on hearing of her terrible end. The neighbours said that the English lady had no doubt gone out of her mind ; but no one expressed any doubt that she had committed suicide. The necessary inquest took place, and it had been discovered that her body bore no traces of violence. Besides, the note left by the unhappy Mary proved suicide only too plainly. Diego was so affected that he had shut himself up in absolute solitude. He saw only his uncle and left to him those cares which death always brings in its train.

It was Morgan who had seen John Slough, and had offered to settle all money questions with him. Neither he nor Diego, however, had expressed any surprise at not seeing Robert, and it appeared as if a sort of tacit agreement kept them away from Ellen's husband ; but Robert was too much absorbed by the anxiety which his wife's illness caused him to pay any attention to their behaviour. For a whole month the delirium continued, attended almost every day by terrible fits. Gradually, however, the fever disappeared, but left the patient in a state of extreme weakness. It was a profound torpor, a general prostration.

That nature so firm, so energetic, so virile, had suddenly disappeared, and when the convalescence of the body was complete the malady of the mind continued. Ellen passed whole days without speaking, holding her son's hand and weeping silently. Summer and a part of autumn passed thus, and Robert could not make up his mind to leave his patient for a single day, in spite of his business interests which urgently required his presence. The time was approaching, however, when he would be forced to attend to the disposal of Mary's property. Ellen was her sister's heir, and however great was Robert's repugnance to occupy himself with questions of money, he was about to finally make up his mind to attend

to them, when one morning John Slough brought him strange news.

Diego, Morgan, and the Moorish servants had left without saying where they were going, and this abrupt disappearance had a remarkable resemblance to a flight. Rumours of this singular departure had spread apace, and creditors had poured in from every quarter. There was no doubt in any one's mind of Diego's utter ruin, and this news was accompanied by the most insulting remarks. Robert soon learnt from a sure source that his sister-in-law's fortune had passed entirely into her husband's hands, in virtue of documents of which the unfortunate woman had not understood even the meaning.

This sad conclusion surprised him little ; he had long foreseen it, and soon consoled himself for it. Mary's death had severed the last tie which bound him to Diego, and the loss of the money was nothing to him, for a much more dreadful trial had been reserved for him. Ellen had never recovered from the blow which the fatal event at Saint-Ouen had inflicted on her. Her strength diminished day by day, and her life was gradually flickering out. Robert witnessed, heart-broken, the slow decay of this loved existence, and, in order to spare his son his share of sorrow, he imposed upon himself the frightful torture of concealing his grief and swallowing his tears.

At that time George was sixteen years old, and he adored his mother. Misfortune is handed down like a heritage, and the poor boy had a sad beginning to his life. It was God's will to send Robert another trial. Since Ellen's illness he had completely abandoned the superintendence of the works in which he had little by little invested the whole of his fortune. A crisis which took place about this time in the trade of France and England seriously affected his interests. The wretched management of the partner who had taken his place completed his ruin. Perhaps, if Robert had been able to interfere, he would have been able to arrest the fast-approaching ruin of the business ; but his time was no longer his own, and he witnessed the disaster without having the courage to attempt to prevent it.

The catastrophe was complete. It left Robert almost indifferent. Whilst his fortune was wasting away, he saw death approaching with slow but certain step, and he tried to dispute Ellen's possession with it. The fatal time arrived. It was in the early spring, and Robert still had hopes. He thought that it was impossible for any one to die during the season when the flowers come to life.

One warm evening in May he had had Ellen's sofa carried out on to the terrace and placed at the foot of the tall elm-tree where her sister had loved to sit. The garden was covered with that soft verdure which precedes the more abundant foliage of summer ; the birds sang joyously, and the sun gilded the splendid diorama of Paris which lay at their feet.

It was, in truth, the birthday of spring. For Robert it was the day of final farewell. Ellen begged him to send George away, and

when they were alone she said, in a voice which was feeble as a whisper:

"Robert, I feel that I am going to leave you. I began to die on the day when my sister became the victim of a cruel murder, and the blow which killed her has smitten me to the heart. Watch over our son. I leave you weapons to defend him with. Take this key: it opens my marriage-chest. I have placed in it the written proof of the crimes of that monster whom we have so long called our brother. If ever George's life were to be threatened by him who brought mourning and disgrace into our family, make use of this proof, and let the felon be punished. May God alone mete out the chastisement!"

These were her last words.

Her voice had gradually become feebler; her arms moved as if she would have thrust death away, and a leaden hue spread over her pale face. Robert had fallen on his knees, and George, who had hurried up on hearing his father's sobs, had thrown himself upon his mother and covered her with kisses. She had still strength to extend to each of them a hand, then her head fell back in a last convulsion. A deep sigh issued from her colourless lips.

It was her last. Ellen was dead.

Robert's despair was of that nature which finds no expression in words—great grief is dumb. It was his wish that Ellen should rest in the cemetery at Whitstable, and he found strength to take her body to England and pay the last sad duties. On his return to Paris, crushed with grief, he found himself face to face with ruin. John Slough, to whom he had entrusted his affairs, had had great difficulty in saving a few fragments of the fortune left by Disney. Robert was especially anxious to keep the cottage in England in which Ellen had been born, and the house in which she had just died in France. He sacrificed his last resources in order to retain possession of these two places, which were not seized by his creditors, and he continued to live at Montmartre for the time being. He found a sad charm in surrounding himself with mournful souvenirs, and he would willingly have died in the midst of the remains of that past which had faded away in tears. His son bound him to life.

George was nearly eighteen. He had just finished his studies, and he showed a decided leaning towards the exact sciences. He was a tall, handsome youth, and his features recalled in a striking manner those of Ellen. His mother's death had imprinted on his character a touch of melancholy that it never lost; but, beneath the exquisite sensibility which he inherited from her, was concealed a firm and upright mind, and a heart filled with generous instincts. The time had arrived when his future must be thought of, and the choice of a career could no longer be deferred. Robert himself felt the necessity of working, in order to build up again that fortune which had so suddenly crumbled away. After the financial

disaster which had befallen him in France, England alone offered him a favourable chance of making a fresh start. He had added to his former knowledge the experience gained during twenty years of work, and it was only to be expected that he would easily find a market for his knowledge in a country where trade at the time was in a most favourable state. He proposed, moreover, to complete George's education in London, and to take him as a partner in his work. So he decided to leave Paris; but on leaving the house where he had spent the happiest days of his life, he could not bear to think of its being profaned by strangers.

Ellen's room remained in exactly the same state as on the day of her death. Robert left there the furniture which his wife had used; he had the fastenings made stronger, shut up the house, which from that time forth wore a tomb-like look, and started with George for England. The faithful Slough accompanied them, so Robert left no one in France that was dear to him, and he resolved never to return but to visit the dear relics at Montmartre.

He would not open the chest where Ellen had locked up the proof of Diego's crime. In spite of himself, he still doubted such wickedness, and he preferred not to learn the fearful truth. He hoped, besides, that chance would never cause to cross the path of his life the man who had done so much to ruin it. He drove away the sad memories of the past, and took refuge in forgetfulness. The future, alas! had other trials in store for him.

The first few years which followed his return to Whitstable passed without incident. He had taken possession of the cottage again, and, by dint of economy, he had been able to defray the expenses of his son in London, who was studying for an engineer.

For his own part, he undertook some submarine works, in company with some former workmen of Disney's. He took to his old profession again without difficulty, and he even found a certain charm in thus returning to the rough occupation of his youth. George seemed also to take a fancy to it, and, more than once, during the short visits which he made at Whitstable, his father let him accompany him on his journeys beneath the waves. The young man proved himself to be brave and skilful, and all the old divers worshipped him; but Robert was far from intending to risk his son's life in this most dangerous of professions.

It was his ambition that George should adopt a different calling, and he hoped at the same time not to be separated from him. His studies and his experience enabled him to fulfil the duties of an engineer and mechanic, and at that time openings were not wanting in England. Not to mention the railways, which began to extend their network over the whole kingdom, navigation by steam had become enormously developed, and men understanding engines easily found employment. The Royal Navy, especially, was at that time recruiting a body of mechanical engineers to whom it offered great advantages.

Now, George had a great taste for navigation, and Robert had always loved the sea. He looked out for a berth for his son and for himself, and, thanks to some old friends of Thomas Disney's who had some influence at the Admiralty, he obtained the post of engineer on a frigate, with permission to take George as his first hand. The young man, who had just obtained his diploma, could hardly contain himself for joy. The name of their ship was the Avenger, and she was awaiting at Portsmouth her orders to join the English squadron in the Mediterranean.

Their preparations were few. Robert had long before installed his old friend Slough in the cottage; he confided to him the care of it, and charged him to watch over what trifling interests he still had in Whitstable and Paris. A week after their appointment the father and son had taken up their posts on board their ship, and the frigate left Spithead on a splendid spring morning which gave the verdant slopes of the Isle of Wight the warm and many-tinted look of some southern shore. On leaving Old England once again Robert could not help thinking sadly of that day when, twenty years before, he had seen the white cliffs of Dover disappear in the haze. God had taken all those whom he had loved then, and, with the adored child who remained to him, he was once more about to brave the perils of life. It was tempting misfortune, and misfortune was not long in coming.

The Avenger was a steam frigate, built several years before upon the old system, that is to say, provided with paddles, and already worn out by numerous voyages. Robert soon saw that they made very little way, and the voyage was a laborious one, for he had to attend to engines which were in a bad state and needed frequent repairs. However, he performed his difficult task with success, and his son's skilfulness was particularly appreciated by the captain, a rather rough old sailor whom George's willingness and good nature finally overcame. Robert was proud to see him beloved and sought by the young officers, who appreciated his gentle and communicative gaiety as much as they did his sound attainments. For his part, he took measures from the very first to live somewhat apart from his companions, and to reserve for himself a few hours of solitude; but he was on excellent terms with all the officers. The English always pay honour to the useful professions, even when they are not brilliant. Robert's post was a difficult one, and entailed a heavy responsibility. To tend and keep in working order the immense mass of machinery which moves a great vessel is one of the most formidable tasks possible, but it is also one of the most attractive. George and his father had come to love the engines which they controlled, as a man becomes attached to the horse which he rides every day, and their gloomy work, hidden in the depths of the steamer, had as much charm for them as that on deck and in the rigging had for the officers. Moreover, the sailing orders which the Avenger received shortly after joining the squadron made their task a less difficult one.

She was ordered to keep open communications between Gibraltar and Malta. Every month she made a voyage between these two stations, and these short trips were followed by intervals long enough to allow the officers to make a stay on shore. The summer and autumn were employed in this easy service.

During fine weather the Mediterranean is nothing but a magnificent lake, and voyages on it resemble pleasure-trips. The winter brought a little variety to a life which every one began to find monotonous, and the Avenger experienced several storms, which taught Robert the dangers of this sea which is so calm in appearance. The frigate behaved fairly well during the bad weather, although she was heavy and difficult to manage ; but the engineers had a great deal of trouble with the engines, which frequently got out of order. Several times Robert thought it his duty to inform the old captain that repairs on land were indispensable, but the old sailor thought that they could be deferred.

The necessities of the service had become urgent. The garrisons were being changed at Malta and in the Ionian Islands, and the Avenger was continually occupied in going to Gibraltar to fetch men, arms, and money. The captain was a man who was too sure of his past experience and too confident of his skill to be stopped by obstacles of secondary importance. Perhaps, even, he took a certain pride in running some risk in the performance of a task which he looked upon as much beneath his merits. One would have said that he preferred to put out to sea in weather which would keep other ships in port, and that he took a pleasure in ploughing his way through enormous waves.

He soon had an opportunity of satisfying himself. At the beginning of January the Avenger was at anchor at Gibraltar, and was only waiting to complete a heavy cargo, consisting of artillery ammunition and money for the soldiers' pay. The passengers were more numerous than usual, for many officers, having obtained leave to go to Naples or Rome for the Carnival, took advantage of the voyage of the Avenger in order to make their way to Italy by way of Malta.

The weather had been threatening for several days, and it was probable that at the entrance to the Straits they would meet with a very heavy sea, for many vessels had been forced to put into the Bay of Algesiras. The captain, who was only too ready to weigh anchor, consulted, notwithstanding, a Maltese pilot whom he had brought with him and who answered for the safety of the trip. The wind, which was blowing from the west, was favourable.

The last of the cargo having been taken on board about five o'clock in the evening, they weighed anchor in order to leave the port before night. Robert had carefully inspected the engines, and, thanks to a few hastily performed repairs, he was in hopes that all would go well at least as far as Malta. He could not help feeling anxious, however ; but he thought he had paid all debts in full to fate, and that misfortune must be weary of making sport of him.

The weather at first was calm. The frigate rolled a great deal by reason of the strong west wind ; but the breeze was still moderate, and they made good way. About midnight, when the frigate was at the mouth of the Straits, the weather changed. The wind went suddenly round to the north-west and began to blow a gale. The engines laboured terribly, and Robert thought it prudent to let George rest and to sit up in his place.

About nine o'clock in the morning an enormous sea struck the ship. Robert, thrown down by the shock, heard a terrible crash which he could not at first understand, but the meaning of which he found out only too soon. The rudder had been carried away.

This was a serious accident—the most serious, perhaps, of any that can possibly happen at sea. A ship without a rudder is like a horse without a bridle. From this fatal moment all on board the Avenger were rushing to death, without knowing on what coast the wind would drive them.

Robert woke his son and went on deck to ask for orders. The sight which he saw was one of those which can never be forgotten. The day was breaking, wan and sickly. It lighted up mournfully a waste of waters of a dirty grey colour, which rose like walls on each side of the ship, and rushed past her with a sinister sound. There was no sky visible. It was hidden beyond the liquid dust which the furious sea threw up as it broke. No horizon. Nothing but a trough of the sea, in which the frigate rolled heavily. Lashed at his post, the captain was encouraging by voice and gesture those sailors who had not been washed overboard by the terrible mountains of water. Robert made his way towards him, and asked for his orders. The old sailor gave him them, firm, clear, and precise, as if the Avenger had been in safety at Malta, at anchor in the port of Valetta. In a few words he explained their situation to Robert. It was a terrible one.

The north-west wind was driving the frigate towards the coast of Africa at a fearful speed, and, deprived of her rudder, she was at the mercy of the waves. In order to steer her, the captain's only hope was in the engines, and this hope was but a feeble one. His plan was, by holding the ship up to the wind by the aid of the paddles, to endeavour to steer due east. But this manœuvre, an uncertain one in any weather, was almost impossible in the midst of a tempest and with inferior engines. It had to be tried, however, and Robert went down to superintend it.

George was waiting for him at his post, his face calm, his look serene, and the sight of his son, so confident in the presence of danger, inspired Robert with a little hope. The whole of that day and the following night were passed in this superhuman struggle against the storm. The frigate kept well out to sea, and did not deviate much from her course. If the wind only abated a little, they might still avoid the African coast, and, the sea having become calmer, rig up a steering-gear and gain a safe anchorage.

It was their last chance. It speedily disappeared. On the morning of the second day the shaft snapped, and the sharp sound of its breaking rang in Robert's ears like a death-knell. Nothing could save them now, nothing but a miracle. The furious impulse of the north-west wind must inevitably drive the frigate on the rocks of Kabylie, and there the natives would finish off those whom the sea spared.

Robert went up on deck with George. Their task with the engines was over, since they would no longer act ; but they could still help the sailors, who were trying to rig a temporary rudder. Before setting themselves to this work, which had become very dangerous, on account of the waves which swept over the ship at every moment, the father and son tenderly embraced one another. They knew that they were about to die, and they knew also that death would not separate them.

Towards mid-day the storm appeared to abate a little, and the wind got back to the west. An unlooked-for chance presented itself ; the Avenger had not yet drifted enough to the south not to clear the coast of Africa, and by steering due east they would have the open sea before them, for two days at least. Hope revived in every heart, and the captain reanimated the exhausted crew by his exhortations. For nearly sixty hours neither he nor his officers had left the deck.

The day passed, and the ship had not changed her course. She was flying at a terrible speed before the wind, with the land on her starboard quarter, and although this was the only course which could save the vessel and her crew, many dangers still menaced them. They had not been able to take any observation for two days, and no one on board knew their exact position. According to the captain's opinion the Avenger was probably at that time passing Bougie, and leaving it about ninety miles to the south ; but these calculations could only be approximate. According to the course they were following they might go to pieces on the islands of Sardinia or Sicily, or pass by a miracle between the two. It was a question of life or death, and God alone could determine it. Towards the evening the wind, although still blowing from the west, dropped sensibly, and they were able to try and set some sail. If the night passed without a catastrophe, rescue was yet possible.

Robert had told George not to leave him, and at about nine o'clock at night the father and son were together in the fore part of the ship. The second mate, who was there on the look-out, had called them to assist him if necessary. The night was very dark, and, in spite of the most careful attention, it was difficult to distinguish anything a short distance away. All at once George, whose eyes were better than Robert's, clasped his father's arm and called out to him :

“Breakers ! I see breakers ahead ! ”

In the dense obscurity which enveloped them Robert fancied he

could distinguish before him a kind of white belt, and he turned to call the officer of the watch, but he had not time. A terrible concussion shook the frigate, and the masts fell with a crash. An enormous sea lifted the hull and let it fall with violence. The Avenger heeled over on her side, and the stern, torn off by a furious wave, plunged and disappeared in the foam. At the first shock Robert, seizing George by his belt, leapt with him into the netting. By clinging to the cordage of the bowsprit, and clasping one another tightly, they were able to withstand the terrible shock.

When the enormous wave which had dashed them on the rocks had poured over them like a mill-race, and as soon as he could get his breath, Robert looked about him and fancied he could distinguish a few cables' lengths ahead a black mass, incessantly washed with foam. It was the reef upon which the Avenger had struck. Behind him the shattered deck of the frigate disappeared in the night. The wreck trembled as each fresh sea washed over it, but it still kept its position. Robert saw that a lucky chance had wedged it firmly between two rocks, and that it would remain there until broken up by the sea.

It was then that a faint hope dawned upon him of seeing the morrow and of saving George. The hours of that terrible night were long, and when the dawn, which had been so impatiently awaited, arrived, the rayless sun cast a lurid glow on a scene of desolation. The bows alone of the frigate were above water. The only survivors of a crew of two hundred men and one hundred passengers, ten or twelve wretches, had taken refuge there. The wind had fallen; but a heavy swell still caused huge waves to break over the wreck, and every now and then to wash off one of the group of human beings who were still clinging to the fragments. The wretched men, crouching one against the other, spoke not a word, and hardly looked at one another. When one of their number disappeared, carried away by the sea, his death did not draw a cry from those whose lives were spared. It was the brute instinct of self-preservation which made them clutch the ropes convulsively with hands and legs. No human feeling had survived.

Robert alone thought of saving his son. His love for George gave him courage to attempt an almost impossible rescue. He examined the reef on which they had struck. It was a group of rocks almost hidden under the water, and whose black points appeared here and there. Two, larger than the rest, reared themselves above their companions. The Avenger had struck on the foremost rock, which formed a kind of promontory towards the west. This isolated rock extended under the water, and Robert explained thus to himself the frigate's position. The bows being reared up in the air on striking, and the stern, torn away by the shock, had plunged into the depths of the sea. The prow was only a few yards from the rock.

The extreme end of the bowsprit almost touched the sharp and

jagged edges. If the shipwrecked men could reach this point and gain a footing, they would be beyond the reach of the sea. It was the only remaining chance of escaping from certain death, and Robert did not hesitate to embrace it. He hastened to make his preparations, before his strength failed him altogether. There were near him some coils of rope. He chose a strong one, made one end fast to the ship and the other to his own body and leapt into the sea, calling out to George not to move.

In a few seconds he reached the rock, but its slippery side offered no hold, and Robert narrowly escaped being dashed against it by the waves. Fortunately he was an excellent swimmer. He succeeded in rounding it, and finally discovered a sloping plane by which he gained the summit. From there he could command the bows of the frigate. Seven men still clung to her. The others had been, one after the other, washed off by the sea. He made fast to a point of the rock the rope of which the other end was on the wreck, and soon he had the joy of seeing George risking himself first of all by this hazardous path and reach the rock hand-over-hand along the rope.

Robert received him in his arms, and they both fell down on their knees to thank God, as if they were saved. And yet they had only changed their manner of death, and the most cruel agony awaited them on this rock lost in the middle of the sea. Of the six unfortunate men who remained on board four only attempted the perilous passage along the rope. The two others felt that they had not the strength to attempt it, and as if the departure of their comrades had warned them that their last hour had come, they let go their hold and cast themselves of their own accord into the sea.

Half-an-hour after their own lucky attempt, Robert and George had received three sailors on the rock; the fourth one's strength had failed him on the way, and the sea had engulfed him. Thus there were in all five poor wretches crowded together on the narrow ledge of smooth and slippery rock which the swelling waves were still covering with foam.

The sky had become clearer. Robert scanned the horizon ; there was not a sign of land. As far as the eye could reach, long greenish waves rose and fell, and the rock which sheltered the shipwrecked men reared itself alone in the midst of the gloomy immensity.

Robert had some knowledge of these shores, and he believed that the Avenger must have struck on some well-known rocks that the Italian sailors call the Sorelle, the Sisters, because of the two which tower above the others. If his conjectures were correct, they were at least sixty miles from the coast of Africa, ninety miles from Sardinia, and out of the route of ships. They had thus in prospect the most hideous of deaths ; death by hunger, by thirst, by cold.

One of the three unfortunate men who shared the fate of Robert and George was a young officer on his way to Malta to join his regiment, and who hardly appeared to be more than twenty. The others were

Irish sailors. Like Robert and George, they owed their lives to the chance which had placed them in the fore-part of the ship at the moment when she struck. Like them, too, they saw night approaching ; a terrible night which must be passed without hope of succour, for the already slender chance of being seen disappeared at the same time as the light. They did not speak, they did not groan ; they waited with the calmness of despair.

Towards evening the young officer began to complain. He was in a delirium, and he called to his mother. Then his limbs grew stiff, his features became set, and his eyes closed. One last convulsion, and he rolled into the sea. The others were unmoved, not one of them stirred in order to grasp the unfortunate youth on the edge of the abyss.

Robert and George had lain down, clasped in each other's arms, so as better to resist the icy chill which enveloped them. The father was lying with his face towards the west, and as the pale January sun disappeared in the sea :

"We shall never see each other again," said he, clasping George in his arms.

Then an icy torpor gradually benumbed him and he fell into a deep sleep, interrupted from time to time by the acute sensation of cold which penetrated to the marrow of his bones. When Robert awoke it had been light for some time. His first thought was of his son.

"George, where are you ?" he asked in a weak voice.

"I am here, father," replied George.

And Robert saw that the poor boy had taken off his coat, and had thrown it over his father's icy limbs. He rose with difficulty and clasped him to his heart, unable to restrain his tears.

"Do not weep, father," said George ; "God will save us."

"Alas ! it is impossible."

"Oh, father, do not say it is impossible. He who gave us strength to reach this rock, can He not send us a ship ?"

"A ship ! Yes, that is the only remaining chance ; but it is a very feeble one."

"And why, father ? Look, as you were sleeping a piece of wood from the poor Avenger floated within my reach ; I managed to get it ; I planted it there at the top of the rock ; I shall tie my white handkerchief to it, and we shall be seen."

"Poor child !" said Robert. "But you do not know that we are on the Sorelle, the most dangerous reef in these seas, the one which sailors fear the most. There is not a ship sailing between the coast of Africa and Sardinia but what goes thirty miles out of her way in order to avoid these breakers. When one sees the Sorelle, one sees death," say the Sicilians. It is a spot accursed, and shipwrecked men alone tread these fatal rocks. How many before us, perhaps, have perished here !"

"No, father, no, do not think of death," interrupted George ;

"a man does not die when he possesses courage ; you have often told me so, and I have courage ; you will see." And the brave lad cast on Robert a glance so calm and firm that the unhappy father began to hope that their lives would be spared.

For the first time since the fatal moment when the Avenger had been engulfed by the waves, Robert calmly surveyed his position. It was a terrible one. The rock upon which the frigate had struck was almost entirely hidden by the water, and the two points from which it derived its name alone offered a refuge from the waves. The higher one, that on which the shipwrecked men were awaiting their death, consisted of a narrow platform which sloped steeply towards the north. The whole surface was not more than thirty paces square. Constantly washed by the Atlantic swell, it had no covering of seaweed, like the rocks on most other coasts.

Nothing lived on this gloomy and desolate rock, and the unfortunate wretches whom the sea had cast upon it had not even the chance of prolonging their existence by means of the shellfish which ordinarily abound in the Mediterranean. However, George made a fortunate discovery. On the extreme summit, in a hollow of the rock, a sort of natural basin formed a reservoir which the rain had filled with sweet water. Of all the sufferings which threaten shipwrecked men, the most formidable, the one that makes itself soonest felt—thirst—was no longer to be feared.

But the supply was not inexhaustible, and it was of the utmost importance to husband this treasure, more precious at that moment than all the gold stored in the Avenger, and Robert took his post near this heaven-sent fountain in order to see that each drank in his turn.

He soon saw that the Irishmen who had been saved with them had no wish to avail themselves of this last resource. At that very moment the two men were emptying a bottle full of rum which one of them had brought in his belt. Death, hideous and threatening, was awaiting them, and, in order not to see it, these poor wretches were intoxicating themselves.

During the night the fragments of the ship had disappeared under the constant action of the waves, carrying to the bottom of the sea the last chance that they had of procuring food. A few barrels of biscuits had floated from the wreck, but the waves had broken them against the rock, and this last hope had vanished in the storm. Rescue, if the castaways were still to expect it, could now only come from the horizon which surrounded the Sorelle like a leaden ring.

Robert and George fatigued their eyes in scanning this gloomy solitude. As far as they could see, the dreary waves mingled with the great clouds driven along by the west wind. Nothing interrupted the monotonous line of grey sky which hung over the sea. It was a liquid desert, a desert without the sun, without the mirage, and death reigned alone over these gloomy realms.

From time to time a gull, blown along by the wind, passed over the rock, uttering its cry, mournful as the groan of a dying man, and disappeared in the mist.

The day passed thus. As the sun was setting Robert turned round to look at it once more. Suddenly he jumped up, giving vent to a loud cry. Southwards, and hardly two miles off, a ship appeared under full sail. They could already see the foam which she churned up as she clove the waves. She had certainly seen George's signal, for she was standing in towards the rock. Presently she hove to, and Robert plainly saw a boat push off. In less than half an hour afterwards it was within earshot, and the man who was in command shouted out to them in English to swim off. There was still too much surf to allow him to bring his boat any nearer.

Joy gives strength. Not one of the shipwrecked men hesitated. In a few minutes they reached the boat, but three of them only. The sea had just swallowed its last victim. Worn out with fatigue, one of the Irish sailors had disappeared on the way. The boat was manned by eight sailors with strange faces and costumes. Covered with ragged cloaks, with naked legs, and wearing red woollen caps, they might have passed at first for Sicilian fishermen; but their bristling moustaches and closely-cropped hair gave them a much less reassuring appearance. A tall man was at the tiller. The hood of his cloak hid most of his face. He spoke to his men in a guttural voice, and seemed to be swearing at them. The castaways had reached the ship so exhausted that they had sunk on the deck, more like lifeless logs than men. Suddenly the man who had sat in the stern began to interrogate them in English. Robert had not the strength to reply. It was his son who related in a few words the wreck of the Avenger.

"What were you on board?" roughly interrupted the man in the cloak, "you and the two others, who look to me as if they would soon be food for the sharks?"

"This man was a top-man," replied George, pointing to the Irish sailor; "I was an engineer under the orders of my father, whom you have just rescued."

"Ha! ha! two engineers and a top-man! splendid recruits for us!" said the stranger.

And he began to talk to his men again in a foreign tongue. His gestures clearly indicated that he was translating to them what George had just said, and the explanation appeared to quiet the grumblers. Robert began to be uneasy, and he half rose from the bottom of the boat where he was lying. He fancied that the captain's eyes were fixed on him. He saw them glittering under his hood, without being able to distinguish his features. The stranger was looking at him intently, as if he was trying to recall his face. His hair plastered on his temples by the sea-water, and his face blue with cold, made him look more like a drowned man than a

living creature, and the man seemed to hesitate. Suddenly he burst out laughing, and Robert heard the following words, which rang in his ears like the last trump :

" What! my dear Mr. Robert, it's you that I've found in this deplorable condition ? "

And at the same time he threw his hood back, and Robert recognised the abhorred face of Morgan.

Robert could not believe his eyes, and his stupefaction was such that he could not say a word.

" And this fine fellow," continued Morgan in a mocking voice, " is young George, whom I have seen playing when a child. Come, it was certainly a good idea of mine to go and see what the white flag meant that was floating from the Sorelle. And these fellows here," he added, pointing to his men, " wanted to persuade me to send you to the bottom of the sea, on the pretext that we did not require your services on the Caïman. That is the name of my brig, my dear sir. But, now I come to think of it, you will find a friend —a relation—on board ; you will guess that I mean Diego. Yes, my dear nephew is my partner, and our little affairs have prospered since we left you—a little abruptly, perhaps ; but one can overlook that want of ceremony between friends."

Robert listened to this hateful jesting without attempting to reply to it. George, whom he had never informed of his suspicions and his griefs, thanked Morgan, and rejoiced naïvely at the idea of seeing his uncle Diego again. Hoping that his silence would be attributed to exhaustion, Robert lay at the bottom of the boat and pretended to be asleep.

The eight men rowed vigorously, and were not long in reaching the ship. A voice which Robert recognised at once, and which made him shudder from head to foot, called to Morgan, and asked him sneeringly what prize he had brought back.

" A splendid one, my dear nephew, a splendid one," cried Morgan, " and I've got a surprise for you. Come, Mr. Robert, courage ; get up, I beg you, and show Diego that I'm not boasting."

Whilst he was speaking, the boat, having been made fast to the tackle, was being hauled up the side, and was soon on a level with the deck. Robert found himself face to face with Diego, and remained immovable, as if he had been turned to stone. Diego started back in astonishment, and Morgan laughingly looked on at this mute scene. He kept up his horrible joke by expressing surprise at their coolness, and urging his nephew to throw himself into Robert's arms.

Diego soon recovered himself ; his contracted features attempted a smile ; he advanced and offered his brother-in-law a hand, which the latter did not dare refuse, and poor George, who knew nothing of the past, threw himself joyfully on his uncle's neck. The deck was covered with evil-looking men, who witnessed this meeting with mocking indifference, and Morgan, with the same ironical politeness, invited Robert and George to go down into his cabin to recover

from their fatigue. The Irish sailor was handed over to the mate, and the castaways followed their hateful rescuer.

Robert's mind was made up. He wished to preserve his son, and, in order to save this precious life, he was resolved to overcome his just animosity and submit to the cruellest of humiliations.

A moment's reflection had enabled him to take in the situation. Diego must be ignorant that his brother-in-law knew of his crimes. Robert felt that his son's fate depended on his silence ; with this end in view he had strength to dissimulate, and to act as if he had never had any suspicions. Moreover, Morgan's first words had told him that he was in need of them.

It was certainly not a feeling of humanity that had prompted him to come and rescue the shipwrecked men from the Sorelle, and since he had not thrown them into the sea on recognising them, it must be that they were necessary to him. Robert founded on this reasoning a fresh hope of safety.

Half-an-hour after their arrival on board, George and his father, clad in warm clothes, and already invigorated by several glasses of rum, were seated at a plentifully provided table, of which Morgan and Diego did the honours.

Determined to play his part to the end, Robert had recovered sufficient self-possession to keep up a conversation on the sad events which had preceded and followed their abrupt departure. Diego, evidently reassured by his brother-in-law's attitude, apologised in sugared tones for having been forced to leave Paris without seeing him. He carried his impudence to the point of lamenting Mary's death, and at this impious language a shudder of horror passed through Robert. Morgan, not to be behindhand, inquired with solicitude as to the cause of his ruin, and when Robert had briefly related his disasters he said to him in a tone of the liveliest interest :

"I am doubly rejoiced, my dear sir, at the stroke of good luck which I owe to that north-west wind. After having prevented you from dying of hunger on that dreadful rock, I can contribute still more to the re-establishment of your affairs. You have heard me speak sometimes of a certain island of which I am sole possessor, and which contains enough gold to make us all richer than we have ever been in our lives. I will not conceal the fact from you that we are making our way thither at the present moment. In confiding to you our secret, to you and this dear boy," he continued, pointing to George, "I am yielding to a feeling of sympathy which is as strong as it is sincere ; but if you have any scruples in accepting my offer I can dismiss them by telling you that you can contribute largely to the success of the voyage. In consequence of financial misfortunes, which have left me with very little money, I have had great difficulty in chartering a vessel and collecting a crew, and, I am not afraid to confess it, the Caïman and the crew who man it leave much to be desired. I picked up these good fellows where I could, without inquiring too closely into their antecedents, and, as for the

vessel, I bought it, as a makeshift, of the Bey of Tripoli. It is, as you may have noticed, a wretched hulk ; but it is provided with engines, and we are only sailing because we have no coal. But, look you ! We have on board men of all countries and all trades. We have sailors, we have gunners, we have even poets : we have no engineer. Our friend Diego was one formerly, it is true, but he's got rather rusty. Fortunately you are here, dear Mr Robert, and, thanks to you, we are now certain of making our little trip quickly. We shall save at least a month, for the Caïman sails very badly."

This speech told Robert what he had already suspected, that Morgan had need of them ; but it left him in a state of uncertainty as to the destination of the ship, for he found it difficult to believe in the existence of the celebrated island of gold. The crew looked like a collection of the worst kind of robbers, and it was only likely that piracy was Morgan's true occupation. The rumours which had been formerly circulated in Paris occurred to Robert's mind ; but the moment would have been badly chosen to ask for explanations, and he eagerly accepted the offer. He was installed with George in a large cabin near the engines, and they both of them soon fell into a sleep which lasted fifteen hours. On awaking they went on deck, where Diego was walking up and down with Morgan, and met with a most favourable reception.

The weather had become very fine; the wind had changed, and the ship, driven by a strong breeze, made rapid way. A glance at the compass informed Robert that they were steering west. He noticed that the Caïman sailed under the Turkish flag, and that the crew talked some Oriental tongue—Arabic, probably—for he recognised the rough accent to which he had become familiarised in Malta. For the matter of that, he did not remain long in uncertainty. Morgan, who appeared to have taken upon himself to initiate him, said graciously to him :

"I see, my dear sir, that my crew puzzles you, and I owe you some explanation before finally giving you an interest in our undertaking. These good fellows of rather ferocious aspect profess the religion of Mahomet, or, in order to be more precise, they were born in a Mussulman country, and they are not very pious. You behold in them the last representatives of an epoch in which privateering flourished in the States of Barbary. The capture of Algiers left unoccupied a crowd of excellent sailors, who, as retired corsairs, love to brave the most dangerous voyages. I always apply to them when I want a safe crew for a trip to my island. I used to know all this coast from Alexandria to Tangiers, and I have many friends here. Thus I have only too many to choose from, and I have always got on well with the recruits I have raised. With these men, you see, there is nothing to fear. When I have brought my cargo of gold back to Europe I pay them, I send them back to eat dates in their native country, and I keep my island to myself."

Robert listened, trying to give his face a look of credulity ; but

possibly Morgan was not taken in by this pretended simplicity, for he could not help smiling every time he referred to his golden island.

Robert did not think it expedient to ask the geographical position of the fantastic island, and he entered on his duties the same day by examining the engines. They were in pretty good condition, and after a few repairs which would be easily executed, there was no reason why they should not work well enough. The vessel was provided with very tall masts and seemed originally to have been built for sailing ; her broad sides and bulging hull allowed her to take a large cargo. She appeared to be heavily laden, for she lay very low in the water and rolled very little. Robert wondered what sort of merchandise she could be taking to a desert island ; but his first idea did not seem to be a correct one. In fact, although the crew was more numerous than is usual on trading ships, the armament consisted solely of two dilapidated swivel-guns, and was certainly not that of a pirate.

In two days' time the engines were ready to work, and by Morgan's orders Robert prepared to steam at full speed on the next day. They were approaching the Straits; and the steep rock of Gibraltar could already be made out to starboard ; but Morgan gave orders to steer south-west, and the Riptieau Mountains, on the coast of Morocco, soon hove in sight. Robert thought for a short time that they were making for Tangiers, but he saw that they were hugging the coast of Africa, in order to gain the Atlantic more quickly. It occurred to him that Morgan was particularly anxious to avoid the war-vessels stationed at Gibraltar and to pass quickly through the Straits, as a traveller who carries a large sum of money with him hastens through a dangerous pass. What confirmed him in this view was the fact that, after having gone for forty-eight hours at full speed, he received orders to extinguish the fires.

They were out at sea at the time, and Morgan, who appeared very pleased, told Robert that the coal must be husbanded, and that they would sail as long as the wind continued favourable. Up to that time, in spite of the suspicious appearance of the vessel and crew, Robert had noticed nothing which was opposed to the idea of a trading brig, and he became almost satisfied that the Caïman was really in search of gold. Three days after having passed the Straits, Morgan took a reckoning, and found that the ship was more than a hundred miles from the coast of Africa. He appeared in a very good temper at dinner. He exchanged glances and smiles of intelligence with Diego, and a good deal more liquor was consumed than usual.

Robert and George, who remained quite sober, found that, under the influence of rum and whisky, the conversation took a singular turn. There were allusions to some enterprise already commenced, to dangers avoided and still to be avoided. Suddenly Morgan rose, his eyes bloodshot, his gait unsteady, and, addressing Robert, said, with an evil smile :

"Come on deck with us, my dear sir. I am going to give my cargo some air at last. It must have been in great need of it for the last ten days. Come, I pray you; I am sure that it will interest you."

Robert followed him without understanding his words, and mounted the poop, where a strange sight awaited him.

Almost the entire crew was on deck, ranged against the netting, armed as for a fight. Soon at the main hatch appeared a sailor, holding in his hand a boarding-cutlass. Two chained negroes followed him. Behind this dusky couple walked another sailor, then more negroes, who took up their position in a line as they reached the deck. Robert counted one hundred and ten of them in two rows. All wore a chain, riveted to their feet and waists, like convicts. The mystery was solved at last, and Robert was astonished that he had not guessed it before.

He was on board a slaver; Morgan and Diego were simply slave-dealers.

A look of sad surprise appeared, no doubt, on his face; for Morgan burst out laughing when he saw it.

"Confess, my dear Robert," said he in the gayest of tones, "that you didn't expect to find me so well provided with 'ebony.' This is of the best quality, and is as good, I can assure you, as a gold mine," he added, emphasising the last word. "Excuse me for not telling you sooner that you were sailing with—what shall I say? I don't like that ugly word slave-dealers—with recruiters for the agriculture of the tropics, if you like. And believe me—I have had much experience—there are few trades so lucrative. Accordingly, I was very anxious to take my nephew as a partner in my little business, and I am charmed that you and dear George should have joined us too. There's some risk of being hanged, especially if you are captured by the English, who are fearfully brutal; but we take care *not* to be captured."

He stopped to give an order in Arabic, and Robert saw the unfortunate negroes begin to walk round the ship, under the eye and whip of ten robust sailors.

"There's loss, too," continued Morgan; "but with watchfulness and care the cargo is pretty easy to keep. You see how I'm airing it. It went very much against me, I can assure you, to leave these poor devils packed in the hold, like sardines; but what is one to do? The Mediterranean is as frequented as the boulevards, and it's not really safe till the Straits are passed. Now that we are out in the open ocean there will be a walk every day and two balls every week. You should see these fellows skip!"

The wretch went on talking for a long time in this way, and Diego did his best to outdo him.

Robert had the strength to contain himself. Now that he knew the secret of these two villains, it would be easier for him to hit upon some plan of escape. He set himself to listen, to watch, and, little by little, he learnt everything that he did not know before.

Morgan had carried on the slave trade for more than twenty years, first in the Antilles, where he was born, then in Brazil, whither he was now going. His brother-in-law, Diego's father, had formerly been in partnership with him; but he had met his end by being hanged at the yard of an American cruiser.

After many changes of fortune—now ruined, now rolling in gold—Morgan, after two lucky trips, had gone and joined his nephew in France, twenty years before. When he had made an end of squandering in Paris, with Diego's assistance, his profits and poor Mary's fortune, he took to his old occupation again. But times had changed. An active watch had rendered slave-dealing almost impossible in the Gulf of Guinea, where it was so easily carried on before, and Morgan had thought of shifting his scene of action. Privateering with the corsairs of Barbary had formerly given him employment, for all robbery was familiar to him. His former relations on the coast of Africa had given him the idea of quite a new plan. Slavery, abolished in Algeria since the French conquest, still continued in the States of Tunis and Tripoli. Numerous caravans brought from the Soudan quantities of negroes, who were to be bought very cheap in the coast towns, and these slaves were stronger and less subject to nostalgia than those from the Congo. To transport them to Cuba or Brazil was a safe speculation, as the Mediterranean was not watched by cruisers.

When fate brought Morgan and Diego within sight of the Sorelle they were coming from Dernah, a small, almost unknown port in the State of Tripoli, where they had collected a crew of former pirates, and embarked as many negroes as they could cram into their vessel. They were going to Brazil, where they were certain, if they escaped the cruisers, of selling their human cargo at a high price; and they did not conceal their intention of going to enjoy themselves in Paris on the profits of the undertaking. The miraculous island had never existed, and Morgan's frequent trips out of France had had no other object than that of buying and selling his fellow-men.

Having been enlightened as to the past life of the two villains who held his life and that of his son at their mercy, Robert calmly reviewed the chances which still remained to them. There was no doubt that Morgan would endeavour to rid himself of the castaways, the day when they ceased to be useful to him; but steam might save him, in case of pursuit, and no one among his crew was able to manage the engines. It was only on the return journey, then, that danger threatened, and Robert had time to prepare a plan.

To pretend to be the dupe and profess confidence was the task he imposed upon himself. He must at any price remain impenetrable. A word, a gesture surprised by one of the scoundrels, was death for both father and son. It was necessary, however, to hit upon some means of escape. Robert thought it pretty certain that a favourable chance would present itself on the coast of Brazil; but, even allowing that he could escape, the problem was only half-solved.

Suddenly an idea struck him. The Avenger contained treasure within its submerged recesses. The gold that Robert had seen taken on board at Gibraltar was now lying at the bottom of the sea, amongst the dreaded Sorelle rocks. The last fragments of the ship had disappeared beneath the waves, and there was nothing to show that the unfortunate frigate had perished on this reef.

Three persons still possessed the secret: Robert, George, and the Irish sailor who had been saved with them; it was possible, moreover, that this man did not know of the embarkation of these cases of gold, although the contrary was the more probable. The father and son were thus the sole masters of immense wealth, lawful masters—at least so thought Robert—since without them the sea would retain its prey. As for the means of getting possession of it, Thomas Disney's pupil was in no difficulty about snatching a fortune from the waves.

Robert clung to this new hope with the energy inspired by his desperate position, and his plan was soon complete: escape with George, land in France under a borrowed name, obtain there by work the necessary means, and afterwards proceed with his son to the conquest of the rich spoils of the Avenger. Before all it was necessary to conceal from Morgan and Diego the secret of the treasure. Robert was sure of George's discretion, and, without explaining to him his plans, he gave him to understand that any disclosures whatever on his part might be dangerous.

The Irish sailor gave him more anxiety, and he set himself to work to study his character and habits. He was a poor man born near Belfast, in the north of Ireland, and, only two years before, he had entered the navy by means of that barbarous system the “press.” His name was Paddy Cassan.

Gay, careless, and talkative like the rest of his countrymen, he had, like them, a great taste for strong drink. Robert had no difficulty in becoming friendly with him, and he determined to watch him narrowly.

The voyage continued without adventures during the five weeks which were passed in gaining the coast of Brazil. Morgan avoided the ordinary track of ships, and any vessel was an object of suspicion to him. As soon as one was sighted, they changed their course in order to keep out of its way, and this manœuvre took place with sufficient frequency to considerably prolong their voyage.

Robert's relations with the masters of the Caïman had remained on the same footing of apparent cordiality as from the first. Each side was playing a part, and each was decided to play it to the end. George alone was sincere in the feelings which he expressed, for his father had decided that it would be cruel and dangerous to undeceive him as to Diego's real character. In this way he spared his young heart a bitter disillusion, and at the same time he made certain that George would play his part well, since he played it in earnest.

The terrible position of the negroes whom the Caïman was transporting disgusted the young man ; but he imagined that necessity alone had forced his uncle to follow this calling. Moreover, the revolting scenes which occurred on most slavers did not take place on the Caïman. Morgan and Diego were smooth-tongued and hypocritical scoundrels, and Robert saw perfectly plainly that they wished to keep up before him the behaviour of well-educated men whom reverses of fortune had constrained to embrace a disagreeable profession. Accordingly the negroes were treated with an amount of attention, which was caused also, in no small degree, by the desire to keep a precious cargo in good condition. Twice a day they were marched upon deck ; frequently they danced to the sound of curious instruments brought from their native country ; and every time Robert witnessed this strange spectacle he forgot the dangers of his position in order to ponder on the strange destiny which caused his fate to be connected with that of savages from the mysterious depths of Africa.

The voyage was drawing to an end. They were approaching the American coast, and the well-known shores where the Caïman was to discharge her cargo were sharply watched by an English cruiser.

But Morgan—Robert could not help admitting it—Morgan was an excellent sailor. He was acquainted with every trick of his profession, and from Bahia to Rio de Janeiro every landing was known to him. Twice he had been chased, and twice he had escaped by gaining the open sea. It must be confessed that Robert himself was of no small account, and that without the aid of a clever engineer the brig would certainly have been taken.

At last, after ten days of fruitless attempts, profiting by a fresh breeze and a very dark night, the Caïman cast anchor in the port of Pernambuco. There she was in safety, for the orders given to the English officers for the repression of the slave trade did not go so far as to enjoin them to attack a slaver in a Brazilian port.

Morgan had agents in Pernambuco, and the human merchandise that he brought was awaited with the more impatience that the watch kept along the coast rendered its introduction very difficult. The understanding between the great naval powers to put a stop to the terrible trade in negroes seemed to have had no other effect than to double the profits of those who practised it, and “ebony” was sold in advance at very high prices.

In a few days Morgan and Diego had realised a large sum, and they had had, in addition to their other good fortune, the luck to lose only five slaves during the voyage. They had still one hundred negroes who, at an average price of a thousand piastres (two hundred pounds sterling) per head, would bring them in more than twenty thousand pounds.

Whilst the sale was going on the crew remained on board. Robert and his son were included in the orders not to go ashore. Morgan gave various pretexts for this ; they were at liberty in

appearance, but they saw plainly that they were watched night and day and that escape was impossible.

As soon as the delivery of human cattle was concluded, Morgan set sail, and thanks to his sagacity and nautical experience he was able to conceal his departure from the cruisers, as he had succeeded doing his arrival.

In a short time the Caïman was several hundred miles from Brazil. Loaded with merchandise taken on board with the sole object of making pretence that they had a lawful cargo, they made sail for Europe without taking any precaution to conceal their route.

Life on board was no longer the same. Morgan and Diego, who, during the first voyage, had never ceased to be sober and watchful, recouped themselves liberally during the return. Every day witnessed excesses, which often turned to orgies when Robert and George had left the table. Freed from all discipline, the sailors followed their masters' example, and gradually reassumed their old habits. Cries, quarrels, and knife thrusts went on without interruption.

Robert's fears increased in proportion as they neared Europe. The Caïman had already passed the Azores, and the route taken manifestly indicated the intention to re-enter the Mediterranean; but, when once he had passed the Straits, would Morgan steer northwards, in order to land in France, or would he continue to the east, to regain Tripoli?

Robert could only guess. He had certainly some hope of obtaining some information by means of the Irishman who had been rescued with them. Paddy's friendship with the sailors, whose language he could now half understand, might have enabled him to gather some precious facts ; but the wretched man had yielded to his favourite passion, and the rum which no one begrudged him had completely clouded his senses. Morgan seemed to take a delight in making him drink, and more than once Robert surprised them engaged in a colloquy which their state of intoxication did not sufficiently explain. One night the orgie which commenced every evening had been prolonged to a very late hour, and the shouts could be plainly heard in the engineer's cabin. Morgan and Diego were evidently more drunk than usual.

It struck Robert that he might possibly creep, unheard, as far as the door of their cabin. By listening to their conversation, he would have some chance of learning their plans, and he determined to make the attempt. He made his way, without difficulty, as far as the main hatchway. From this spot he was able to follow the conversation, which reached him through the half-open cabin door ; and, in case of surprise, he would be able to make his escape on deck.

Robert had at first some difficulty in hearing what passed above the sound of clinking glasses and fists thumping the table, but presently Morgan's voice rang out above the din.

" You know nothing about it," said the rascal to his nephew,

"and your plans are those of an old woman. Mine is the only sure one, and I intend to carry it out."

"There's something in it," sneered Diego, "a good deal in it; but one can't always make use of it; and if I'd had only it to fall back on twenty years ago, I should still be waiting for my dear father-in-law's millions. The millions are spent, but we know where to find some more——"

"Silence is golden, my son," interrupted Morgan, quickly. "I don't talk business after drink. Let us talk about your Saint-Tropez invention. Do you know, you ought to have taken out a patent for the use of those who wanted to prove an alibi?"

"Yes, it wasn't bad; but no matter, in the best managed affair there is always a weak spot, and now and then, to this day, I'm not easy in my mind."

"Bah! remorse! you!" cried Morgan. "Come!"

"Remorse, no; uneasiness, yes."

"And of what kind?"

"I never told you; when I went to fetch the box containing old Tom's will and his gold, from under the stone where I had hidden it, I found the gold safe enough, but the will had disappeared. Ah! if I'd only had time to burn the will!"

"Double fool that you are! if the man who took it wanted to make use of it, do you think he would have waited till you came back from Brazil? Look you, my poor Diego, you have plenty of imagination, but your reasoning is at fault. Your fears are senseless, and the French law hasn't got such a long memory. In three months, my old accomplice, we shall have changed our skins, and we shall be calling ourselves 'Messrs. Ten Millions' citizens of the Equator Republic. My own carcase is not worn out yet, and there are happy days in store for your uncle."

Robert had heard enough, and he regained his cabin. If any doubt as to Diego's crimes had still lingered in his mind, Morgan's vile jests would have dispelled it. The past life of these robbers was an earnest of the future, and their baseness made Robert's blood run cold; but the imminence of the danger nerved him for an effort, and he prepared to play against them the decisive game of which the stakes were his own life and that of his son.

The brig was nearing the Mediterranean, and whatever course it followed it must, at a given moment, be at no great distance from land. To take advantage of the night and the drunkenness of the crew in order to launch one of the boats, to throw himself into it with George, and endeavour to gain the nearest coast, was a plan of which the execution was difficult and dangerous, but it was the only one practicable, and Robert adopted it resolutely.

The moment was approaching. They had passed through the Straits of Gibraltar, and were shaping their course westwards, when a violent squall from the south struck the ship off the coast of Algeria, and forced her to fly before it. These squalls are very

common in the Mediterranean towards the end of summer, but as a rule they are of very short duration. Robert calculated that the Caïman would in all probability be driven towards the Balearic Islands, and that after the storm a chance of escape would present itself. He was only half wrong.

After a run of four-and-twenty hours, Mount Toro, which is situated in the middle of the Island of Minorca, appeared in sight, but the violent sirocco which still blew drove the ship much farther to the north-east.

The wind only began to fall the next day. This alteration in their course had irritated Morgan in the highest degree, and to console himself he had been drinking all day with Diego. At night they were both of them completely drunk. Fatigued at having passed the whole of the previous night at their posts, every man of the crew was asleep, with the exception of a few men on watch and the helmsman. They could not be far from the coast of France, and the barometer indicated the cessation of the storm.

Robert made up his mind that the time had come, and made his preparations for leaving the ship towards the middle of the night. Taking the long boat or cutter was not to be thought of. Besides the fact that they could not be lowered by one man, any attempt to do so would infallibly have attracted attention. Robert had to be satisfied with a boat which hung at the stern, very small and in very bad condition. It was in this crazy concern that he must attempt with George a voyage of which he could not calculate the length. He had stored in his cabin a few provisions, clothes, and a compass. There was nothing more to do but to await the favourable moment and inform his son. George had no suspicion of his plan, but Robert was sure that he would obey him without questioning, and that he would follow him blindly.

Before engaging in this last struggle against fate, he was anxious to collect himself, and he went and leant on the nettings, his head resting on the bulwarks and his knees on a coil of rope.

The moon was then in its first quarter, and its rays silvered the crests of the waves raised by the swell. Absorbed in his reflections, Robert was contemplating this imposing tableau, and his thoughts went back to that day when, long ago, in view of the vast estuary of the Thames, Ellen had plighted her troth.

At that instant an unsuspected, shattering blow fell on his neck, and at the same time a mighty grasp clutched his legs. Without seeing the man who had seized him, without having time to turn round or to utter a cry, Robert was flung overboard. He turned over in the air and disappeared in the sea.

When Robert came to the surface again the brig was already far away. He could still see the stern of the Caïman lifted on a wave, then the black mass plunged downwards with the motion of the swell and disappeared. He did not even attempt to raise a shout or cry. He felt that he was lost.

Robert was an excellent swimmer, and the sea, although still running very high, was calm enough to allow him to keep afloat for some time ; but if even he had the strength to struggle on until daylight, very little hope remained for him. To fall in with a ship or be noticed was a miracle upon which it would have been mad to have counted, and all Robert's efforts could only serve to prolong his agony. He shut his eyes and was about to let himself sink when an idea struck him.

God had rescued him from the Sorelle ; perhaps He would save him again. Robert collected all his energy and began to strike out gently in order to husband his strength. The long undulations of the swell supported him, without his having occasion to help himself by violent efforts, and he felt himself being drawn in a north-easterly direction by a very strong current, which must have been running at least six miles an hour. The moon was at full, and gave enough light for Robert to see some distance. Each time that the motion of the sea carried him to the top of a wave he eagerly scanned the horizon, like a traveller lost in the desert trying to discover an oasis. Each time, too, the liquid mountain which supported him gave way beneath him, and he sank down between two waves, without having seen anything in the midst of this moving solitude. How long did this last ? He could never remember afterwards. His brain was benumbed, and he was only living a mechanical life. Sometimes a ray of light traversed his mind, suddenly lighting up some forgotten scene of his boyhood or infancy. Then a shudder ran through him, and his thoughts forsook him again. Gradually a feeling of physical pain drowned all others. Sharp pangs shot through his limbs and seemed to crush his chest. He felt a singular sensation. It seemed to him that his body was shrinking, and that sleep was slowly creeping upon him. He knew that death was approaching. He had still the strength to turn over and swim on his back. He took a last look at the sky, then he shut his eyes and let himself sink.

A sharp pain awoke him. His head had just struck against some hard body. Robert turned and saw a black object which he took at first for a rock ; but he saw that this object was descending with him the side of a wave. It was a boat. He collected what strength he had left ; a desperate effort brought him to it, and he succeeded in grasping a rope which was hanging from the stern.

He called ; no one answered, and his despairing cry was lost in space. His hands, numb with cold, had barely enough strength to cling to this rope by which his life was suspended ; but courage returned to him with hope. He began gradually to near the boat, and when he arrived within reach of it he took advantage of a moment when a wave lifted him up to grasp the gunwale. With the help of his arms and legs he succeeded in clambering into the boat. It was empty.

The rudder was swinging about at the mercy of the waves, and

two oars, firmly fixed in the cleats, trailed overboard. It was the smallest kind of boat, one of those which are used for disembarking passengers in a port, and Robert was never able to understand by what chance it had got adrift in the middle of the sea. The most probable conjecture was that the storm had caused it to break from its moorings in some port in the Balearic Islands or Corsica, and had driven it out to sea.

But Robert did not stop to wonder then, and his one thought was how to profit by this piece of good fortune. Already the horizon was growing brighter towards the east. Daylight would soon appear, and Robert waited for the sun to guide him, for he was in the most utter ignorance as to his whereabouts.

It rose and shone upon a calm but deserted sea. Not a sail was in sight. Towards the north only a faint greyish line, which he took at first for a cloud, appeared against the horizon. On scanning this attentively Robert fancied he could make out a chain of mountains. If he was not mistaken, the land in sight could be no other than the coast of Provence. He seized the oars and began to row vigorously.

Joy had restored to him all his strength, and memory returned to him at the same time. The events of the night came plainly before him, as if a mist had been cleared from his brain. His plan of escape, his fall, Morgan's intoxication, his terrible conversation, all fitted in, all became clear, and foremost in his mind occurred the recollection of George. The idea of his son, alone in the hands of those villains, made his heart bleed. At the same time an idea struck him.

If Morgan had employed a ruse to get rid of him, was it not plain that he had some interest in sparing George's life? What was there to prevent him from murdering or drowning the father and son through the agency of his villainous crew?

Robert knew them well enough, him and his worthy accomplice Diego, to be certain that they would not shrink from committing a crime in broad daylight. If they had taken the trouble to rid themselves of him by means of a surprise, it was, no doubt, because it suited their plans that his disappearance should be attributed to chance. No one had seen him fall, for the place where he was leaning when he had been seized was some distance from the little group of sailors sleeping on the deck, and the cry which he had uttered must have been lost in the sound of the waves. The plan by which he had been thrown into the water was no doubt the one of which Morgan had spoken to Diego on the evening of the debauch. The scoundrel was right. It left no traces.

Every one on board believed doubtless that Robert had accidentally fallen into the sea, and the wretched man reflected that at that very moment George was receiving the hypocritical condolence of his father's murderers. The poor boy would believe himself alone in the world, and Robert shuddered at the idea that he would perhaps love these wretches as he had loved him. Before God, who

had saved him once more, Robert swore to get him out of their hands.

He had the courage to take this oath, adrift as he was in the middle of the sea in a frail boat; dying of thirst, of hunger and fatigue, uncertain whether he could gain the land, more uncertain still of the fate which awaited him if land he did.

The sun was now shining on a group of mountains whose jagged outlines were well known to him. He was much nearer the coast than he had supposed, and the wooded heights which he saw were part of the Chaine des Maures. Cape Camarat was a few miles before him, and he saw on the right the entrance to the Gulf of Saint-Tropez.

Thus chance, or rather Providence, had brought him straight to the shore which recalled to him such dear and such cruel memories. It was there that he had spent such happy days with Ellen ; it was there, too, that Tom's murder had begun the long series of his misfortunes.

Suddenly, in this review of the past, one point appeared to him and called up a whole world of ideas which followed one another and were linked together with singular clearness. Beyond this coast, in the middle of the common, Thomas Disney's gold was, perhaps, still lying beneath the stone where the assassin had concealed it. With this gold, if he succeeded in finding it again, Robert could procure clothes, a passport for Italy, for the East, scour the Mediterranean until he had discovered the Caïman and rescued his son.

He was not more than fifteen miles from land now, and, by rowing vigorously, he might reach it during the morning, but it was not wise to attempt it. When Robert had been thrown overboard the cloak which he wore on his shoulders had been lost in the fall. The unfortunate man had only a pair of coarse cloth trousers and a shabby straw hat. In this woful state he would be an object of suspicion to everyone, and it was to his interest to avoid speaking to a soul. He determined, then, to wait for night before landing. The wind had quite dropped, and, by one of those sudden changes which are so frequent in the Mediterranean, the sea had become as smooth as a lake. It was the beginning of September. The sky was perfectly clear, and the sun, which was already high in the heavens, was darting beams as hot as in the middle of summer.

He rowed slowly, in order to husband his strength, and also so as not to approach land too closely. The current was setting towards land, and he was confident of being able to reach it at any time he chose. He was not suffering from hunger as yet, and he had determined, moreover, to put up with it all day. There was nothing, then, to prevent him from keeping out at sea until sunset, which at that time of the year took place at about seven o'clock.

Robert had left thirst out of his calculations.

To the icy cold which had chilled him not long before had succeeded a burning fever which parched his throat. The heat was

torrid, beneath a leaden sky, and the last breath of air had died away. He tried to swallow a few mouthfuls of sea water, and only succeeded in increasing his tortures. Presently his head became heavy, his ears buzzed, his sight failed him. He felt that if he waited till night before landing, his agony would drive him mad.

In order to avoid meeting any one, mid-day was almost as favourable as night on such a scorching day, in a country where every one goes to sleep in the middle of the day. If Robert could, without being seen, s'ake his thirst at a spring which he knew of on the cliff, there was no reason why he should not put out to sea again, and remain there until sunset. So he determined to land, and at about half-past eleven he had gained the shore. The long stretch of sand which borders the sea at this spot was deserted, and there was nothing denoting the presence of a human being on the cliff above. There was no time to hesitate. Robert sprang on land, ran as fast as he could towards the cliff, found the spring, and greedily drank of the life-giving water. Full of hope and courage, he was in the act of regaining his boat, when two men hidden in the bushes sprang up and seized him.

They were two revenue officers who doubtless took him for a smuggler. In vain the unfortunate man struggled; he was thrown down, bound, and taken off to prison. There he was questioned like a suspicious vagabond.

"Who are you? Where do you come from?" they asked.

But Robert would not reply. If he had yielded, if he had given way in the slightest degree, if he had related the history of his strange life, would they have believed in the truthfulness of the involuntary slave-dealer, in the innocence of Morgan's companion? To denounce the villains who had George in their power would be, perhaps, to avenge himself, but it would also be to pronounce sentence of death upon his son; for Morgan and Diego, threatened with capture, would not hesitate to do away with a witness who had it in his power to ruin them.

Robert persisted in his silence. He was tried, and when the sentence depriving him of his liberty for a whole year was read to him he had sufficient resignation and self-control not to cry out to the judge: "Why, it is I who am the victim of the crimes which I am accused of committing!"

A few days after his conviction Robert was confined in the prison of the department of L'Hérault. Then he began his painful apprenticeship to a felon's life, without for one moment failing in his resolve. The first few months were the hardest to bear. The very natural curiosity that Robert had created had not yet died away; he was compelled to defend himself against questions and to avoid traps. He succeeded, by persevering in the system that he had adopted. He would not tell the truth, and he scorned to tell a lie. Absolute silence safeguarded him, without lowering him in his own esteem,

Little by little, moreover, the interest which attached to him diminished. The circumstance was forgotten, and finally Robert enjoyed perfect indifference. He even succeeded, by his gentleness and good conduct, in becoming a favourite with the warders, and prison life would have been bearable, if it had not been for the terrible necessity of living in the society of degraded beings.

His long hours of captivity were soothed by hope, that grand consolation of the afflicted. Moreover, the man who bears within his breast a fixed plan can with impunity pass through the most painful trials. His resolution preserves him from dangerous connections, at the same time as it buoys him up above all troubles.

The year which Robert passed in prison was employed in maturing his plans, and thinking out means of rescuing his son. It was almost certain that George, having been left alone on the Caïman, had followed the fortunes of Morgan and Diego, of whose crimes he had no suspicion. Robert had, then, a clue which was sufficient to put him on his track. It was, he well knew, a difficult and dangerous enterprise, but it was sufficient for him that it was not impossible.

The first of all the elements of success in the campaign which he was about to commence, was money. He would have left prison with the meagre pittance amassed by a year of manual labour; but a generous man, who had been present at his trial and who had taken an interest in this living enigma, had left for him, in the hands of the authorities, a sum of five hundred francs. It was a fortune.

This trifling sum which the generosity of a stranger had provided him with served as the basis of a bold plan. Robert swore to save his son or perish. On leaving prison he was not freed from supervision and the obligation to reside in a certain town. He easily obtained permission to live in Marseilles, and with the small sum which he had in his possession on regaining his liberty he was enabled to take a modest lodging and live for some little time.

Without losing a moment he began to prepare to carry out his plan. It was impossible for him to put it into execution unaided, and there was only one man in the world in whom he could trust. That man was John Slough, whom Robert, before his departure, had placed in his cottage at Whitstable. Was he still alive? The last news that he had received from him dated from two years back. Robert wrote to him, at any hazard, taking care to compose his letter with great care, in case it fell into the hands of strangers. He informed him that he was alive, and begged him to keep his existence a secret and write to him at Marseilles under an assumed name. He had purposely omitted to sign his name, knowing well that Slough would recognise his old master's writing.

A few days must necessarily pass before an answer could arrive from Whitstable, and Robert took advantage of this time to put into execution a plan upon which he counted much. Clothed like the Provençal peasants, he took the road towards Var, and arrived one evening in that same village of Cogolin, where he had slept on the

night of Thomas Disney's murder. Time and grief had so aged him that he was sure of not being recognised. No one could remember, after so many years, the young and joyous stranger of the red-tiled *bastide*. Robert thought, however, that it would be the most prudent plan not to halt at Cogolin, and before taking the path which led to the common, he went and sat down to wait for darkness under a plane-tree just outside the village. The sun was casting its last rays on the rich landscape which Ellen's young husband had wandered over in days gone by, and he amused himself by looking at the smiling picture which the neighbourhood of a Provençal village always presents. A numerous band of children was crowding tumultuously round an object which Robert could not quite make out. Presently the joyous troop divided, and one of the biggest boys appeared mounted on a wheel which he tried to force along, but he lost his balance at every moment, amidst the bursts of laughter from his comrades. The gaiety of these urchins was so hearty, and their gambols so noisy, that at least they diverted Robert's mind from his sad thoughts.

He approached the group, and saw that the children were joyously carrying along one of those curious machines, at that time almost unknown in France, which have long been in use in England. Robert had often witnessed at Whitstable races on these machines, which consist of two wheels separated by a narrow seat, and he had been astonished at the swiftness with which they got over the ground.

The one that the children were playing with was in very bad condition. The springs, rusted as if they had been for a long time under water, were greatly broken, and Robert learnt that the boys had just discovered this machine at the bottom of a disused water-cistern. He was wondering what chance had transported this English invention into the heart of Provence, when suddenly a ray of light flashed across his mind. He had discovered a missing link in the chain. The shepherd who, on the night of the crime, had seen a fantastic traveller—the diabolical ride upon a strange apparatus—all was clear to him. The puerile invention which had amused him in his youth had become the instrument of a vile murder, and the assassin, as a refinement of crime, had made use of an innocent plaything to make certain of escaping from the results of his wickedness.

Here was no trick of a common scoundrel, and no one but Diego could have invented it. Robert remembered now his brother-in-law's frequent absences, his inexplicable expeditions about the deserted country during the time which preceded Disney's death. The monster was practising on the machine, which he had no doubt hidden in the cistern where the children had found it. The trip to Marseilles, the night passed at the inn at Cogolin, were parts of a long-meditated plan to prepare an alibi for himself. All the details of the horrible plot became clear at the same moment. He had carried off the gold in order to give the idea of theft; the will,

which he had not had time to burn, he had hidden, so as to get rid of a damning proof.

Robert recognised plainly in all this the infernal mind which for the last twenty years had applied itself to the organising of crime and the perfecting of assassination. At last God had permitted that truth should manifest itself, in order to destroy the doubts which, in spite of himself, Robert still retained, and to strengthen him in his resolution to punish the murderer.

The children had gone away ; the sun, which had just disappeared below the horizon, was tinting the sky with a ruddy glow. The time had come to set off in search of the gold which was to put revenge in his power. Robert reached the common about eleven o'clock.

The moon was showing a feeble light ; but the clearness of a southern night, all glittering with stars, sufficed to guide him, and he recognised without difficulty the stones in the middle of which the box had been concealed. He had some difficulty, however, in finding the exact spot, and he raised several blocks without result ; but, under a large stone all covered with moss, his foot struck against the tin box, which was half eaten away with rust.

He opened it with trembling hand, and saw that the paper in which the gold was wrapped, having rotted with age, had allowed the coins to escape. He took possession of them without scruple and without fear, for they were about to serve to rescue the last victim from the assassin's hands. The box contained eleven thousand francs. It was enough to start the campaign with, and Robert returned to Marseilles full of courage and hope.

John Slough's reply awaited him there. Poor John wrote in terms in which his joy overflowed. He believed Robert dead ever since the news of the wreck of the Avenger had arrived in England, where everyone thought that the frigate had perished with all hands. He ended his letter by offering his old master his goods and his person. Robert hastened to tell him that he accepted his devotion, and begged him to join him as soon as possible. A week after Robert embraced his old servant, or rather the old friend of his youth.

Slough shed tears of joy on seeing him again, and of grief on hearing the sad story of the last two years. When Robert explained to him his plan, and told him of his hopes, the intrepid sailor did not hesitate for a moment. Foreseeing that his master must have had need of money, the good John had brought all his savings : about five hundred pounds.

With the gold recovered on the common, Robert had at his disposal twenty thousand francs, a sum more than sufficient for the undertaking which he was meditating. He learned with satisfaction that nothing had ever been heard of the Avenger, and that the scene of the wreck was unknown. Robert was thus the only one to possess the secret, and the only one, so he hoped at least, who would obtain any advantage from it, for George and the Irish sailor were not in a position to dream of doing so.

It remained to determine upon the means of carrying out the operation with safety, and above all with promptitude, for time was precious. John, who had sailed a good deal in the Mediterranean in former days, was very well acquainted with the African coast and the Sorelle reef. It was he who hit upon the most simple and most practicable plan. It was out of the question to engage any sailors to help them, and, on the other hand, they could not set sail without some ostensible purpose in view. It was therefore necessary to act without assistance, and to find a pretext for landing on the Sorelle.

The supervision to which Robert was subject was not very strict, and he had no great difficulty in embarking with John for Africa. Having arrived at Algiers, they gave themselves out as English sailors from Malta, who had come to the coast to fish for coral. The centre of this industry has been for the last two centuries established at the little seaport town of Calle, on the frontiers of the State of Tunis.

They went and took up their quarters there, and obtained a boat which they were able to manage by themselves. When he wrote to John in England Robert had taken care to tell him to bring with him two complete divers' costumes and an air-pumping apparatus. The profession of coral-fishers which they had chosen was sufficient to explain the possession of these objects. They had, moreover, taken precautions to avoid drawing attention to themselves, and they led in every respect the life of fishermen. There was soon no one on the coast who would not have taken them for poor men who had come from England to gain a precarious livelihood. People even laughed at them about their boat, which they had bought very cheap, and their idea of setting out without engaging a sailor, and without even taking a boy with them.

Before embarking upon their enterprise at the Sorelle, Robert deemed it necessary to go out several times to fish in reality, in order to have some practice at diving, which he had had time to forget. It was not a very easy matter for two of them alone to attempt such an important undertaking, and a few preliminary trials were indispensable.

The experiments took place on coral reefs at different depths, and were perfectly successful. Robert soon regained the self-possession and skill of which he had been a master before, and by dint of pains and perseverance they succeeded in making themselves proficient. Whilst one of them dived, the other had to manage the air-pumping apparatus, a task which is usually shared by two men.

In this lay their principal difficulty.

It was overcome, thanks to John's energy and vigour, and from that time forth, success was certain. In the intervals between their trial attempts, Robert had had several opportunities of talking to sailors from Tunis and Tripoli, who traded along the coast, and he had gathered some valuable information,

The Caïman was not unknown in the neighbourhood. She had even visited it recently, for the captain of a Tunisian *chebek* had come across her near the island of Pantellaria. This man, who had boarded her to sell fish, had noticed, so he said, three or four Europeans, and he little suspected the joy with which this news was received by George's father. The general opinion among the fishermen was that the Caïman carried on the smuggling trade between Italy and Spain ; but no one knew her exact destination.

This mattered but little to Robert. It was sufficient for him to know that the vessel had not left the Mediterranean, and he had no doubt that George was one of the Europeans who had been seen on Morgan's brig.

The time to act had arrived. Robert and John left Calle on a fine morning in August. The wind was favourable, the sea calm, and fine weather was assured for at least a few days. On the day after their departure the Sorelle were in sight, and on casting anchor near the rock where he had formerly passed such a terrible night Robert could not control a feeling of emotion. Nothing was changed in the menacing appearance of the dreadful rocks ; it was only that the waves were not dashing furiously against them.

They reared themselves, rugged and gloomy, in the midst of a sea as blue as the sky and as transparent as crystal. Robert began by exploring that part of the reef where the Avenger had struck, and he saw, with joy, that the frigate had remained in the place where she had foundered. From his boat he could distinguish, in ten fathoms of water, the great red bars of the engines standing up in the middle of the *débris*.

The day passed in making their preparations and choosing their exact anchorage. Robert remembered perfectly that the cases of gold had been stowed in a compartment underneath the gun-room, with the exception of six, which the captain had received just at the moment of weighing anchor. These, owing to the press of time, had remained in his cabin. Forming his designs according to what he remembered, Robert determined to operate on the compartment under the gun-room, which promised to be the easiest to reach. It was settled that he and Slough should dive in turns, and Robert took upon himself to make the first trip.

Clad in his costume, he descended to the wreck and discovered the deck in shallow water, or rather the remains of the deck, for time and the waves had almost destroyed it. He found that the gun-room was accessible, and he noted with joy that he should have less difficulties to contend with than he had foreseen.

One severe task, however, was before him. The trap-door which covered the compartment must be discovered and raised with a crow-bar. His first visit was taken up with this operation. Robert had the good fortune to discover the trap-door, and the strength to open it.

The cases were in their place. Piled one upon another, they took

up a small space, and Robert fancied that those which were at the bottom of the compartment had been crushed beneath the weight and partly emptied. This mattered little, however, for there remained enough to carry out his project ten times over, and he had determined to be content with extracting part of the treasure, leaving the rest until after he had rescued George. Robert ascended and explained the position of the wreck to John, who had no doubts of success. Their only fear was that of being surprised at their work, but that was little likely; for sailors avoided the dangers of the Sorelle, and the divers had taken the precaution to conceal their boat behind a rock, so that they should not be noticed.

They calculated that one week would be sufficient for them to raise four or five cases, which would be enough, since each of them would contain, according to the rules of sea transport, ten thousand guineas. With forty thousand pounds Robert had ample with which to purchase, were it necessary, a vessel in which to pursue Morgan.

The next day it was John's turn. He dived, and was successful in making fast to the first case, which was hoisted and placed in their boat before night. The work, however, had been very severe, and several times they had to interrupt it in order to disentangle the case from amongst the wreckage. The second and third gave them still more trouble, either because they were less favourably placed, or that the strength of the workers had begun to fail them. Robert was hesitating whether to hoist the fourth, when it occurred to him to explore the captain's cabin, where he had seen six cases stowed, in order to see whether they could not be extracted with less difficulty.

He himself undertook this fresh journey, and after having given John instructions so that he could follow all his movements with the boat, he dived and made his way to the stern, progressing slowly, and taking all the precautions that a long experience suggested to him. The ship was lying at a sharp angle, her prow inclining upwards, and Robert had great difficulty in keeping his footing on the slippery deck. He soon came to a gap, and discovered that the frigate had divided into two parts. The sternmost part, where the captain's cabin was situated, formed a separate wreck, and in order to reach it, Robert had to traverse, not without peril, a space several fathoms across.

He succeeded in this without accident. The walls of the captain's cabin had disappeared, and the floor was covered with wreckage. Amongst this Robert noticed with surprise some wood-work which seemed to belong to some broken cases. He thought to himself that possibly the sea had burst some of them open, and he continued to advance. The light, which had been sufficiently strong in the shallow water, diminished in proportion as he descended, and soon he had some trouble in finding his way. Objects appeared to him through a thick mist, and he recognised

them by touch almost as much as by sight. He kept stooping down and feeling on the ground for the cases ; but he had already been almost round the cabin without coming across anything beyond furniture, and he was about to abandon his investigations, when his hands grasped some long, rounded body. At the time he was on his knees before the unknown object, which stood upright before him. He thought at first that he had encountered one of the columns which support the deck in ships ; but on feeling it more carefully he found that this supposed column yielded to the pressure of his hands.

Suddenly Robert started back horror-struck. The object that he had grasped was a man's leg.

Accustomed as Robert was to these terrible discoveries, this one filled him with fear and disgust. He rose, and found himself face-to-face with a human form which swayed about slowly and presented a strange appearance. In the semi-darkness he saw a kind of metallic lustre shining on the head of the corpse. Robert had the courage to approach and examine more closely the terrible apparition. His face struck against a plate of glass, and his arms grasped some soft and sticky substance. The man who stood thus before him in the realms of death was a diver in helmet and breast-plate. His hand was still grasping his life-line, and his arm was extended as if to give the signal to haul up. Through the glass plate against which Robert had thrust his face he fancied he could dimly distinguish the large round holes of a skeleton's eyes.

So some one had been before him, and the treasure had already been visited by some unfortunate man, who had met his death there. In all probability the air-pipe had broken ; but why had not the diver's companions hauled his body up ?

A suspicion flashed across Robert's mind. He took hold of the pipe which was floating above the head of the corpse and examined it. It had been severed at some distance above, and the cut had not been the result of an accident, for it was sharply defined, and could only have been done by a man's hand. Robert stooped and saw that the dead man was bound by the waist to the column. Doubt was no longer possible. The wretched man had perished, the victim of his companions' vengeance or greed. Robert had thought to have done with crime, and he had found it at the bottom of the sea.

To the feeling of horror which took possession of him soon succeeded one of vague uneasiness. Who could it be whom he had encountered at this dreary rock ? Who could have found out the secret of the Avenger's treasure ? In spite of the repugnance which he felt, Robert severed with his diver's knife the cords which bound the corpse, fastened a rope to it, dragged it to the gun-room, and gave the signal to haul up. On reaching the boat and taking off his helmet, John was horrified at his pallor, and asked him whether he had met with any accident. Robert was so upset that he hardly had the strength to relate what he had seen.

As he listened to the account of this strange discovery, John Slough became more and more gloomy. One would have thought that a superstitious terror had taken possession of the old sailor. Robert and he looked at one another without daring to express their thoughts, but the same dreadful presentiment occupied both of them. This uncertainty was too cruel. Robert made a violent effort to control himself, and ordered John to haul up the rope which he had made fast to the unknown victim of an odious crime. Old Slough obeyed, and a cold sweat bathed Robert's temples when he saw the corpse emerge from the water in an upright position, like a horrible apparition.

A dazzling sunlight shone on this strange scene, and, by a trick of memory which often preserves the impression of the smallest details after time has effaced the effect of more thrilling sensations, Robert often recollected afterwards that the glass of the helmet reflected the rays of the sun like a mirror. He was too much affected to help John to hoist the body on board, and whilst the old sailor was unfastening the apparatus which hid the dead man's face, George's father remained standing, his hand on his heart, which was beating so as almost to burst his chest. Suddenly John Slough uttered a loud cry :

“ Go away, master ; do not look, in heaven's name ! ”

And he thrust him away as he bent over the corpse. Robert resisted, and fell on his knees at his side.

The beloved head of George, his adored son, was there before him, livid and disfigured. His eyes, open and staring, seemed to be looking at his father, and reproaching him for not having known how to protect him. Robert turned away and fell as if he had been struck with a hammer. When he recovered his senses John was bending over him and bathing his forehead with sea water. He looked at him with a startled gaze, then suddenly the consciousness of the terrible reality dawned on him.

“ Where is he ? where is he ? I must see him ! ” he cried, sobbing. His old friend held him back and pointed to a human form lying beneath a sail, which was covering him like a shroud. His heart failed him, and he fell strengthless at the bottom of the boat. Great tears rolled down the old sailor's weather-beaten cheeks, and it was plain from the motion of his lips that he was praying.

How many hours passed thus ? Robert never knew ; but when he recovered from the state of prostration into which grief had plunged him, the sun was sinking below the horizon. To his crushing despair had gradually succeeded the only feeling which could henceforth exist in him—that of vengeance.

Then the monster had finished his task ! He who in twenty years had deprived the unfortunate Robert of all the beings he loved, one after the other—that man had killed his son. The *bastide* murderer, the Saint-Ouen murderer, was now the Sorelle murderer ; and if

Robert had escaped him it was because God had willed that one man should remain to punish the author of so many crimes. Robert understood at that hour that he was charged with a sacred mission, and that he had not the right to die so long as the cowardly murderer of an old man, a child, and a woman existed.

He rose, calm and inflexible, and, George's body stretched at his feet, John's hand in his own, he swore to avenge the dead. Strange fact! from this solemn moment his coolness returned as well as his courage. The terrible emotion which had taken possession of his whole being had turned him to marble, and he turned, without giving way, to the sad duties which it remained for him to fulfil.

He had secured sufficient gold to make certain of revenge, and he left the rocks without giving a thought to the enormous treasure which had escaped the notice of George's murderers, and which he scorned to take with him. Robert was anxious to gain the coast quickly and to land at night, in order to be able to secretly bury George's body. John undertook to steer, and on the following night he run the boat into a little bay, six miles to the east of Calle. He knew the spot, and he knew also that fishermen seldom visited it. After having made certain that the shore was deserted, Robert and Slough carried the body to a place which they had chosen. It was a wooded ravine which opened out at a few hundred paces from the shore. There, at the foot of a gigantic locust-tree, John dug a hole deep enough to preserve the beloved remains from the voracity of the hyenas and jackals.

The task was a long one. Whilst he was performing it Robert had seated himself near the body of his son. He wished to look upon him until the last moment. The sea preserves the dead. George's features were not changed. He seemed to be asleep. The moon cast its pale light on the scene, and a lion roared in the distance. The supreme moment arrived. Robert, with his own hands, laid in his last resting-place the child whom he had loved so well, and then he helped John to fill in the grave.

When the sad task was finished the unhappy father planted on the tomb a cross which he had fashioned with branches of myrtle, knelt on the earth which covered George, and prayed. Before day-break the boat entered the harbour of Calle, and the early-rising custom-house officer who was walking on the quay little suspected that the frail vessel carried a fortune. Robert had determined not to lose a single day in starting on his search of Morgan and Diego, and he settled with John the plan of the campaign.

He was about to enter on a struggle with scoundrels who possessed a fortune which almost assured their impunity, for they must have taken more than sixty thousand pounds from the cases in the cabin; but he calmly reviewed the chances of the combat, and did not despair. He, too, had gold, and he possessed, in addition, one great advantage. Men do not fear the dead, and the wretches who had thrown him into the sea had certainly not taken measures to

protect themselves from the vengeance of a man whom they believed had been drowned long before.

What had become of them, and how should he put himself on their track? The information that Robert had gathered was very vague. He had good reason for thinking that Morgan and Diego, eager to enjoy their wealth, had taken refuge in some great capital, and probably in Paris. On the other hand, the remarks of the coast fishermen went to prove that they had been seen recently off the shores of Africa. By common consent Robert and John determined to collect more information by scouring the coast towards the east.

Their coral-fishing boat was quite sufficient for this preliminary investigation, and the gold was in perfect safety at the bottom of this miserable concern, for no one would take it into his head to look for it there. Moreover, it was important to leave Calle without giving rise to suspicions, or allowing any one a chance to follow them. To start on a fishing excursion and not return was the simplest plan, and it was pretty certain that no one would trouble himself about them. Coral fishers are very eccentric in their habits. It would be thought that the two Englishmen had shifted their quarters to Malta or Sicily, and they would soon be forgotten.

The remarks that Robert had heard with regard to the Caïman had given him to understand that Morgan engaged his men between Tunis and Alexandria. It was, therefore, in this direction that he would be most likely to gather information; but it was necessary to be extremely careful, so as not to create attention in any port. There was a danger of meeting—either at Tunis or Tripoli—some of Morgan's rascally crew, but Robert was much altered in face and dress. Moreover, he intended to despatch John Slough by himself to obtain news, and he was an entire stranger to them.

They obtained no information at Tunis.

Robert was prepared for this, the port of Goletta being too much frequented for Morgan to cast anchor there. At Sousa, which is a small harbour to the east of the Gulf, chance was more favourable. In the middle of the almost deserted creek, which at rare intervals serves as a harbour of refuge for Arab boats, a large vessel was anchored, and Robert without difficulty recognised the Caïman. She was quite dismantled, and seemed to be in a very bad condition.

Her worm-eaten hull rose very high out of the water, a fact which denoted that she was quite empty, and not a soul was to be seen on board. She looked like a deserted hulk.

Robert hastened to make inquiries. A Jew who kept a small *café* on the quay appeared delighted to satisfy his curiosity.

The Caïman had cast anchor at Sousa three months before. She was then commanded by three Europeans, who had paid off their Arab sailors and set off at once for some unknown destination on an Egyptian *chebek* which they had purchased. Nothing had been heard of them since, and the commandant of the little fort which

protects Sousa had already written to Tunis to inform his government of the abandonment of this important vessel. He was expecting every day to receive orders to take possession of it in the Bey's name. From the description which the Jew gave of the three Europeans, Robert recognised Morgan, Diego, and George. He learnt further that they had taken with them on the *chebek* but one sailor, a European like themselves. This could be no other than the Irishman, Cassan. As for the Caïman's crew, the cut-throats who composed it had dispersed after having indulged in frightful excesses. They were all well provided with money, and made no secret of the expedition from which they had just returned, expressing their intention of sailing again under the orders of Captain Bou-çif (the man with the sword), as they called Morgan. They expected to meet him again at Tripoli or Dernah before a year had expired. One thing was clear from this information, namely, that the expedition to the Sorelle had been undertaken without the aid of the Caïman's crew, and that after George's murder Morgan and Diego had remained the sole masters of the secret and the gold. The Irishman was a dangerous accomplice. There was no doubt that they had got rid of him.

In which direction were they to be followed?

Robert tried to settle, according to reason, the most probable course of their actions since the crime at the Sorelle. It was not probable that they had returned direct to France, where the landing of their millions would have appeared too suspicious if they had arrived there on a wretched *chebek*. It was probable that they had first of all gained some land where a less strict watch was kept, in order to find their feet there and devise some plausible means of existence.

They must have a story to tell, and be able to give some account of where they had come from, so that their abrupt reappearance in Paris should not be too noticeable.

The best plan, then, would be to explore the neighbouring countries, such as Spain, and, above all, Italy. Their wealth would, moreover, help Robert to discover them. It is difficult to hide one's self when one has unlimited gold to spend.

John shared his master's opinion, and they decided to start for Sicily. Robert wished to avoid Malta, where he might have been recognised; for, from very different reasons, he was obliged, like George's murderers, to conceal his identity and his fortune.

It was necessary to find some port where he could land his gold without giving rise to awkward questions, and he knew that the Italian custom-house officers are always accommodating to strangers who are disposed to be liberal.

He set sail, then, for Sicily; but he visited in succession Catania, Messina, and Palermo without finding the least trace. He had taken the precaution, before leaving Calle, to stow a few ragged garments on board, so as to be able to pass for a coral fisherman,

and he did not consider it necessary to change his character. The cases full of gold served as ballast, and no one would think of looking for them.

Without being discouraged at his want of success, Robert steered for Naples, where he would probably have a better chance. On arriving there he cast anchor at Castellamare, which seemed to him to be a favourable place for a secret landing, in case some definite information should cause him to take to the land altogether. He knew the country, having stayed there years before when travelling in Italy with his dear Ellen, and he was acquainted with twenty favourable spots along the coast, between Castellamare and Sorrente.

Robert knew Italian well. He determined to scour Naples, offering coral for sale in the cafés and hotels, whilst John guarded the boat. Thanks to this plausible pretext, he became acquainted with hotel servants, footmen, and guides—all persons who were well informed as to the movements of foreigners, and all disposed to talk, provided they were treated.

But Robert could learn nothing of interest to him. The news which occupied general attention was the tragic death of an Englishman, who had perished in approaching too closely to the crater of Vesuvius, which was then in full eruption, but this story failed to touch him.

A whole week passed in useless wanderings, and Robert was beginning to despair of success. He had probably been mistaken. He had argued from a wrong basis, and he would be obliged to rely on chance to put him on the right track. He was sadly indulging in these reflections on the evening of the eighth day, on walking along the road which leaves Naples at the Bridge of the Annunciation and follows the sea as far as Castellamare, passing through Portici. Night was approaching, and he was hastening his steps, when, on leaving the little village of Torre del Greco, a beggar asked him for alms, in bad Italian. His foreign accent struck Robert, who looked at him attentively. This man was not begging in the state of semi-nudity which is usually the case with *lazzaroni*. He was, on the contrary, completely clad, but his torn and filthy clothes resembled those of the dwellers in St. Giles, the most miserable district in London. A wretched hat of waxed cloth, pressed down over this strange beggar's eyes, half hid his face, and only showed his red whiskers and pimply chin.

This drunkard's face caused a vague suspicion to rise in Robert's mind, and he asked him in English what country he came from. The sham *lazzaroni* raised his head, gave vent to a guttural exclamation, and thrust back the hat which hid his features. Robert recognised Paddy Cassan, the Irish sailor.



XI.

THE venerable chaplain's voice had not faltered. The court, the jury, and the public listened with increasing excitement, and the hours slipped away without any one noticing that night was approaching. However, it was impossible for the case to be finished that day, and the president announced that the hearing was postponed until the morrow.

The crowd dispersed regretfully, and curiosity was excited to such a point that many passed the night on the Place du Palais. Accordingly, when the doors were opened the court was besieged by a more numerous crowd than that of the day before.

The proceedings promised to be more sensational than ever. The interest redoubled in proportion as the climax approached, and the circumstances with which Abbé Guérin's dramatic story had ceased gave reason to hope that this gloomy mystery would at last be cleared up.

The prisoners reappeared in the same order. He upon whom all eyes were turned, he whose fateful existence was beginning to dawn on people's minds, Loiseau, seemed to be more collected and not so crushed by grief. The chaplain's words had cheered his courage and made his glance more firm, and the conviction of his innocence was gradually breaking in upon the hearts of all.

The two Arabs preserved the resigned attitude which fatalism confers on the children of Islam in the presence of death. They felt that they were lost, but they remained fierce and indifferent. Profound silence reigned in the court when the priest rose and continued his speech.

* * * * *

Paddy looked at Robert with amazement, and made the sign of the cross, as he muttered a prayer. He took him for a ghost.

"You are not mistaken, my poor Paddy," said Robert, extending his hand to him; "it is indeed I."

"What, master, you are not dead?" stammered the Irishman.
"Is it true you're not a ghost?"

And he shrank back instinctively as Robert approached. The latter knew only too well the cause of Paddy's dread; but it was neither the time nor the place for reproaches, and it was important to question him before he had had time to recover himself. An inn appeared by the roadside a hundred yards further on.

"You must be hungry and thirsty, old comrade?" said Robert.

"Yes, yes; especially thirsty," interrupted the Irishman.

"Very well; to convince you that I am flesh and bone like yourself, we will go and have something to eat and drink in that inn,"

Ten minutes afterwards Robert and Paddy were seated at a table in a little garden planted with citron trees, belonging to the inn. A dish of macaroni was smoking on the table, and two bottles of Capri stood before them.

This was the best way to loosen Paddy's tongue. His eyes opened wide on finding himself in the presence of this unlooked-for feast. He threw himself on the macaroni with the avidity of a shipwrecked sailor, and swallowed, one after the other, several glasses of the most heady of all the wines of Italy. Robert did not stint him; but before questioning him he wished to inspire him with confidence by feigning to ignore the past.

"You didn't expect to see me again, Paddy, and, in truth, I was near being a breakfast for the sharks," said Robert, affecting to be merry. Then, in order to completely reassure him, he hastened to add a plausible explanation.

"Yes, I swam for two hours, and I was picked up by a Genoese vessel. That will teach me to go to sleep in the shrouds after having had too much to drink. I've been looking for the Caïman for three months. And what have you been doing since my mishap? Give me some news of the captain, and Diego, and George." As Robert spoke this, Paddy was getting uneasy and perceptibly growing pale. He muttered some incoherent words, and drank to give himself courage.

"Ah, master, they're gone. I'm alone now; poor Paddy has no one to keep him from dying of thirst in this infernal country, where there's not a drop of whisky to be had. I wanted to go too—to go back to Ireland—but I've no papers to take ship with, and then, look you, the Caïman hadn't a very good name. It wouldn't do to tell the consul that you've sailed in her." The wine began to have an effect on him, and Robert knew the Irish character well enough to feel certain that Paddy could not long keep the secret which was weighing on his mind.

"But," replied Robert, "I sailed in the Caïman, too, and you know that it was not our fault that we were there. Come, I promise to get you through it all right, and it shall never be said that I left a brave comrade like you in distress. But I must find my son first, so tell me all you know, Paddy, and you will never repent it, I can promise you."

The wretched Irishman hung his head, and great drops of sweat rolled down his face. Suddenly he started up like a man who has taken a resolution, and began to talk with that emphasis and volubility which are peculiar to his countrymen.

"Listen, master," he cried, "I'd just as soon tell you all. Paddy is very poor, and God is punishing him because he obeyed the cursed Saxon; but Paddy is not a scoundrel like him, and you will soon see that he was forced to do as he did."

Robert saw that a confession was approaching, and he felt himself sink under his emotion.

"When you fell into the sea," continued the drunkard, "the young master cried a great deal. He called for his father; he wanted to die, but they consoled him, the villains! If he had known—I knew—I saw that wretch of a Morgan spring on you like a wild-cat. But I said nothing; I did not want to break poor Mr. George's heart; he had enough trouble already. And yet it was me, master, it was me that was the cause of his misfortune."

"You, Paddy?" interrupted Robert; "it's impossible! Why should you have injured the son of the man who saved your life at the Sorelle?"

On hearing this word Sorelle, Paddy threw his arms in the air, then he began to pace up and down the garden, gesticulating like a madman, and finally fell on his knees, beseeching forgiveness. The blow had gone home, and it was useless to dissemble any longer.

"Get up, wretched man," cried Robert, "and tell me the truth, if you want me to forgive you. I know all, and if you lie you shall die like a dog."

Rage blinded George's father; he snatched up a knife, and was tempted to kill on the spot the miserable accomplice of his son's murderers. Paddy trembled in every limb. He tried to speak, and his voice died away in his throat. At last he collected himself, and Robert shudderingly listened to the dreadful tale which he had long guessed.

During the voyage, after their return from Brazil, the Irishman, who got drunk every day, had talked before Morgan of the Avenger's treasure, and from that instant Robert's death as well as George's had been decided on. Diego had proposed to do away with them immediately; but his worthy confederate had explained to him that it would be difficult to remove the cases of gold without the aid of an experienced diver, and they had then contrived a hellish plan.

They resolved to murder Robert first, to attribute his disappearance to an accident, to acquire George's confidence afterwards, in order to make use of his services, and to crown the work later on by killing the son as they had killed the father. God had allowed this horrible scheme to succeed.

Poor George, after having wept for a long time, had transferred his love to the monsters who loaded him with hypocritical attention. Morgan and Diego, after having paid and dismissed their sailors, had sailed for the Sorelle with George, abandoning their ship, and only taking with them the money produced by the sale of their slaves. The Irishman had joined them, because he might be useful to them, and because, moreover, they thought that they should be able easily to rid themselves of such a despicable accomplice.

They had procured two complete diving costumes at the port of Valetta, in Malta, whilst the Caïman had waited for them at the south of the island, in the little harbour of Mersa-Scirocco. As for the terrible scene on the reef, Robert had guessed it already. Paddy only knew of the cases which had been stowed in the captain's

cabin. They had been removed by George and Diego, who dived together. At the last trip Diego had come up alone. Morgan had cut the pipe which supplied George with air, whilst his cowardly accomplice bound the body of Ellen's unfortunate son in his watery grave.

Robert had listened to the sad tale without saying a word, without one of the muscles of his face moving. Paddy looked up at him from time to time. This immovableness frightened him. As he progressed with his tale he became more and more uneasy, and it was in a suppliant voice that he said on concluding :

“In the name of all that is sacred, master, I did not know what they were going to do with him. May the Lord punish me if I lie. May I be damned like the villain Morgan——”

Robert stopped him by a gesture, and said coldly, looking fixedly at him :

“All that you have just told me I knew. You took part in a crime which God has commanded me to punish, and if you wish me to forgive you, you must help me to find the murderers. Where are they? What has become of the villains that you followed to Naples?”

“The villains, master? There is only one now.”

“What do you mean?”

“What! you don't know? They haven't told you the story of the fire-mountain?”

“Speak! speak!” cried Robert, who could hardly control his passion, “and do not hope to palm off any lies on me. I must have both their lives, and if you deceive me I shall hand you over to justice. You are their accomplice. Do not forget that.”

“Well, master,” began Paddy, terrified, “listen. After the business at the Sorelle was over—but you'll forgive me, won't you, if I speak about the young master again?—I asked why he was not coming with us, for I didn't understand much about the air-pump, and I thought he would come up every minute. Morgan took a pistol and pointed it at me and said: ‘You'll never see him again, fool, and if you breathe a word I'll send you after him.’ He saw that I was trembling like a leaf, and he went on: ‘You'll get so much more, idiot, as there are only three of us; but keep quiet, or I'll blow your brains out and give your Irish carcase to the fishes.’ Poor Paddy has only his life in the world, master. I was frightened, and I said nothing. The same night we sailed for Naples, and two days afterwards we anchored in the harbour of Sainte-Lucie. I stopped on board with Morgan. Diego slept on land, but he came back next day dressed like a lord. He talked a long time with Morgan in some language I didn't understand, and went back to Naples in a boat which he hired in the harbour. When he was gone Morgan told me to weigh anchor, and we tacked about in the gulf, getting nearer and nearer to Pansilippa. When it was dark, Morgan, who held the tiller, steered for the shore, and we landed in a little bay

just opposite the island of Nasida. There I began by his orders to land the sacks of gold, one after the other. A trap was waiting for us on the road which runs along the shore, and on the box I saw Diego dressed as a coachman. He helped me to stow the gold in the trap, and when that was done he told me to throw away my sailor's coat and hat, put on his livery, and take the reins from him. Under his coachman's clothes he had his fine suit that he had worn the day before. Morgan changed his sailor's clothes, too, for the good ones that Diego had brought him. They both got into the trap and told me to drive to Naples. Luckily I knew how to drive, because I took care of the Bishop of Belfast's horses before being pressed on the Avenger, and cursed be the public-house where the devil told me to go that day!"

"Go on, in heaven's name!" cried Robert violently, exasperated at his chatter.

"Pardon, master, pardon; I only meant to say that the villains had need of me, or else they would have sent me to the bottom along with the boat, for Morgan made a great hole in her with an axe, and she sunk. I didn't know the way, but they called out to me where to turn. In less than an hour we were at Chiaïä, at the entrance to the Villa Reale, and they told me to pull up in front of a palace that didn't seem to be inhabited at all. Morgan and Diego got out, opened the gate, and went in. I believe that the old Diego had taken the palace, passing himself off for an English lord, and that he had paid in advance. The next day Morgan told me that I was to be their footman until they could set off for England, and that I should only get my share of the gold on the ship. Soon there came some servants, coachmen, butlers. Our house was grander than the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland's, and all these folks respected me because they knew that I was confidential servant to their lordships."

Robert was dying with impatience, but he could not help smiling at this naïve trait of Irish simplicity, and Paddy, more at his ease, continued imperturbably:

"Bankers came, too, and had private interviews, and at last they took away the gold; but Morgan told me that there were papers for me, and that as long as I lived I should never want for whisky, roast beef and potatoes—"

Robert's face put on a severe expression, and Paddy hastened to get back to his tale.

"Morgan and Diego," said he, "seemed to get on very well together, but I knew there was something in the wind, for I'd seen Diego giving his uncle a very queer look once or twice. At the end of about two months it seemed all our business with the bankers was settled, for they told me that we should soon be leaving for London, and I was glad enough to leave this infernal country. In the meantime we went for a drive round about every day. I sat on the box by the coachman, and I looked very fine in my livery. One

day my masters wanted to go and see that mountain that throws out fire, and which is, for certain, a blow-hole of hell. I was frightened to go near it; but they would never leave me at home alone, and I had to go. We had driven as far as the village they call Portici, and there they hired horses and guides to clamber up this cursed furnace. They wanted to go and see the river of fire which comes down from the top of the mountain. Look, master, you can see it from here." And he pointed to a large red spot which flamed in the darkness on the side of Vesuvius.

"It was an evil wish of theirs," continued Paddy, "and I told them that the devil didn't like people to go and look at him too close. We went up as far as the horses would carry us; but as we got nearer the fire the poor brutes began to snort and jib so that we had to get off. We left them in charge of the guides, who told us not to go on, and I started on foot with my masters. We walked on black stones that were hardly cold, and I would have given a guinea to stop; but Morgan told me I was a coward, and he never rested till we had got right to the edge of the lava, as they call the river of fire. It was running along, six feet below us, slowly, slowly, with a sound like a furnace, and thick smoke that blinded us. It was like dough in a baking-pan, or like the molten ore when they forge bars of iron in the furnaces at Tynemouth. There was nothing interesting in it; but my masters seemed to take a delight in staring at this devil's mud. They had gone right to the edge, and Morgan told me to go and fetch a bottle of rum from one of the guides' wallets. He wanted to drink to the devil's health at the door of his kitchen. This was his own expression, master, and it didn't bring him luck. I didn't wait to be told twice, and I started back as fast as I could; but I hadn't gone ten yards when I heard a cry—oh! a cry, master, such as they must utter in hell. I turned round, and I saw Diego on the brink all alone. I was very frightened; but, however, I ran back to him and looked. Ah! master, if I lived a hundred years I should never forget what I saw. Morgan was standing up to his knees in the lava, which was gradually mounting up to his thighs. He had fallen upright, as if he had jumped in feet first. You would have thought it was a soul from purgatory in the flames, such as one sees in the images in our huts in Ireland. He was uttering shrieks which made my hair stand on end, and his face was convulsed like that of a lost soul. It was not for long. From the burning mud there came a long jet of flame, which enveloped Morgan up to his head, and then he fell like a tree. His feet, burnt to the bone, could not bear him any longer. He fell flat, then disappeared, and I saw him no more. Only a puff of smoke rose from the place he had just left, as when one throws a handful of powder on the fire."

Robert listened, mute with horror, to the terrible story which Paddy related in his calmest tone. God had, then, performed half his vengeance, and the infamous Morgan had perished by the hand

of his accomplice, for Robert did not doubt that he had been pushed into the abyss.

Without noticing his emotion, the Irishman continued :

"Look you, master, when it was all over I thought my last hour was come, for Diego's face was terrible. He glared at me with the eyes of a wild beast, as if he would have thrown me in the fire as well, for I didn't tell you so, but I'm certain he pushed Morgan in. I set off to run towards the horses, but I heard some one calling me, and when I turned round I saw Diego looking just as usual. 'What a misfortune,' he said quietly, 'and how right you were, my poor Paddy, to tell us not to come here. Come, let's go back to the guides. You saw how the accident happened, didn't you? You can help me to explain.' I had understood only too well, and I was too frightened of him to contradict him. The guides said at once that they had warned us, and that it was no fault of theirs. We made our statement at Portici. I thought there would be an inquest, but in this country of savages there's no coroner as there is with us, and the *podesta* of the village didn't think fit to put himself out of the way. We went back to Naples, where the news soon spread, and I didn't feel comfortable. I had too many secrets on my conscience. Diego treated me well, to prevent me from talking, but I believe he'd have got rid of me in the end. He thought, perhaps, that I wasn't worth while killing, and that hunger would despatch me, for one night when I was asleep he left the house and did not return. He had settled everything with his bankers, and taken ship for Constantinople. The other servants had been paid and dismissed, but I hadn't a sou. The owner of the place came the same day to turn me out, and I thought myself lucky to be left my livery, for I sold it to buy something to eat. I thought at first of informing against the villain Diego, but then I thought that I might find myself mixed up in it too, and that it was best to keep quiet. For nearly a month now poor Paddy has been sleeping in the open air in these rags that you see, and living on melons and spring water. If he had not met you, master, he would have died, and as long as he lives he will be as faithful to you as a dog."

Robert had listened with profound emotion to this terrible story. The information which a providential chance had put him in possession of would enable him to discover Diego ; and Paddy, although he had not as yet entire confidence in him, might be of great assistance in the pursuit which he was about to engage in. Having made up his mind to attach him to himself, Robert gave him some money and told him to come to him the next day at a hotel of which he gave him the address. He was certain that he would not fail to keep the appointment, and he did not wish him to know about his boat.

The time had come for giving up the life of a fisherman, and returning to his proper sphere, and Robert took measures first of all for placing the treasure in safety. John, whom he had told of his

meeting with Paddy, took upon himself to land the gold, bag by bag, and to bring it to him at the Villa Combi, where he took up his quarters the next day. A fortnight sufficed for old Slough to transfer this fortune to land, and Robert immediately converted it into a letter of credit issued by the firm of Rothschild, of Naples, on all their agents in Europe. He was satisfied that Paddy had spoken the truth, and that Diego had really gone to Constantinople.

Morgan's tragic death had created a great sensation at Naples ; but no one suspected that it was the result of a crime, and people had attributed his friend's abrupt departure to the grief which such a terrible accident had caused him. Robert took the Irishman into his service, for happiness and a comfortable home had made a reformed character of him ; but he charged John Slough to keep his eye on him, for he was still fearful of his drunken propensities. Armed thus at every point for commencing his pursuit after his son's murderer, Robert embarked with Slough and Paddy on the French steamboat which ran between Naples and Turkey.

On arriving at Constantinople the first news he heard was the departure of Diego. He had left Pera three days before to travel overland to Egypt, accompanied by a Frenchman, whom he had met at the Hôtel d'Angleterre. It was hardly possible for Robert to follow him on his journey across Asia Minor and Syria, with an escort and in company with a stranger. He thought it best to await him at Alexandria.

But his revenge was doomed to be once more deferred. After staying two months in Egypt, Robert learnt that two travellers had embarked at Beyrouth, in order to return direct to France, and that one of them called himself Monsieur de Pancorvo.

It was the new name that Diego had chosen. Robert did not hesitate ; he left immediately for Marseilles. On landing, he found that the Beyrouth steamer had come into port a week before.

Diego had evidently made his way to Paris, and it was there alone that Robert was certain of discovering him.

He was, then, about to find himself face to face with the enemy whom he had been pursuing for so long ; but in proportion as his vengeance approached he was the more anxious that it should be sure and overwhelming. He had thought at first of fighting Diego, after having thrown all his crimes in his teeth ; but to die in a duel was not a sufficient expiation for the crimes of the past. The scaffold would not be too much for a monster who was a four-fold assassin. Robert determined that the public executioner should punish George's murderer. He determined to seize Diego red-handed in some act of crime, and drag him to justice.

Robert was certain that the wretch would not halt in the path of crime, and that he would hurry to meet his doom. He resolved to dog him until the day when he could surprise him in the act. He settled upon his plans with John, and they each took a part in the hunt after the murderer.

Time and grief had so altered Robert that he was unrecognisable, and he possessed, moreover, a natural facility for changing his expression, and even his features. He could watch Diego the more easily than the latter thought he was dead. It only remained for him to adopt a costume and a profession which would permit him to approach his victim without arousing his suspicions.

Robert intended that Paddy Cassan should also have his part in the scheme. Diego probably thought the Irishman too degraded to have any mistrust of him, and if he could manage to introduce himself into his house he would be advantageously situated for serving Robert's purpose. As for John, who was well known to Diego, it was important that he should keep away from the scene of action, and carefully conceal his presence in Paris. Robert determined to utilise his services when his vengeance was ripe.

He was still in need of a home which would be safe from prying eyes—a sure retreat where he could collect himself for the terrible task which he was about to undertake. He thought of the house at Montmartre, which luckily had not been sold, and on arriving in Paris his first care was to go to the notary whom he had employed to look after his interests. The latter recognised his client with some difficulty, but the details which Robert gave him finally satisfied him of his identity.

Robert told him that he had just come home from the Antilles, where his business would compel him to make some further stay, and that as he only proposed to stop a short time in France he wished, for economy's sake, to live in his old house, in whatever state it might be.

The notary warned him that he would find it in a very ruinous condition, no repairs having been undertaken since his departure; he then handed him over the keys, and on a dreary autumn day Robert took his way to Montmartre.

It was not without deep emotion that he looked upon the spot which had such dear and such painful associations.

Time and solitude had done their work. The garden, left to itself, had become over-run with undergrowth. The worm-eaten gates seemed ready to fall to pieces, and the house threatened to become a ruin.

Before crossing the threshold Robert summoned all his courage. A superstitious dread caused him to stop at the beginning of the terrace, where she whom he had loved so well had died in his arms. He fancied that the spirits of Ellen and George were flitting about under the tall trees. He called to them in a low voice, and, in the murmur of the leaves shaken by the autumn wind, he believed he heard their voices.

He entered. Nothing was changed. Ellen's bed-room remained as it had been on the day of her death, and Robert burst into tears on recognising her marriage chest, the chest of which she had given him the key when she bade him farewell. This was the home that

he wanted ; it was here that he would live, surrounded by remembrances of the past, and hopes of vengeance. He soon concluded, with John's help, the necessary arrangements. He took up his quarters on the second floor, and he set apart Ellen's bed-room to pray in, and allow his grief to give force to his resolve.

He collected there everything which had been his wife's, as well as a mournful relic he brought from the Sorelle — the diver's costume in which George had died. He hung it against a black curtain, upright, as he had seen it in the cabin of the Avenger. If it had ever been possible for Robert to forget the crime and his vengeance, these dismal remains of his son would have recalled them to his mind.

John Slough went to live at Passy, where he took lodgings, and in order to explain his solitariness he gave himself out as a foreigner. He was to keep Paddy as his servant until the time when he could be profitably employed elsewhere.

Each one began the search for information, and there was little difficulty in obtaining some. Diego, once believing himself safe, was not the man to keep in the background, and at the end of a week Robert knew his name, his house, his habits, and his friends. The time had arrived to utilise Paddy's services. His conduct had been irreproachable, and Robert had no longer any doubts as to his fidelity.

It was settled that he should present himself, poorly clad, before Diego, who would be sure to receive him, if only to question him. The story which he was to tell had been agreed upon in advance. He had travelled from Naples to Paris, begging on the way ; he was dying of hunger, and begged Diego to take him into his service again. He was not to complain of his abandonment at the palace at Chiaia, and was, above all, to make no allusions to a dangerous past.

Robert felt certain that the so-called Pancorvo would attribute this forgetfulness to Irish heedlessness, and that he would have no suspicion. He even went so far as to hope that, as a measure of precaution, and in order not to lose sight of the man who knew some of his secrets, Diego would take Paddy into his service.

Things turned out precisely as Robert had foreseen. Paddy underwent a long cross-questioning. He answered all questions with that air of simplicity that the Irish know so well how to assume, and finally Diego engaged him.

Robert had thus intelligence from the heart of the enemy's country, and he had not long to wait for news.

Diego had organised his manner of life in such a way as to defy betrayal. His household consisted of two servants whom he had brought from the Levant, and who knew not a word of any language but Arabic—a very convenient method of providing against the effects of unguarded conversation. He lived very little at home, passing most of his time at a club to which he had managed to gain admittance, and had no intimate friends, but he kept up a

grand appearance out of doors, and certainly spent a great deal of money.

This was exactly what Robert had wished. He knew well that the wretch would soon come to the end of the money he had taken from the Avenger, and that he would endeavour to obtain more by means of some fresh crime.

Robert waited, sure that punishment would come at its own time, but he was desirous of keeping a closer watch on Diego, and he set to work to look for some place which would put him in daily contact with him, without risk of being recognised. It was then that he had the idea of engaging himself as a footman at the club which Monsieur de Pancorvo frequented. He had his beard shaved off, his hair cut short, changed the expression of his face, and succeeded in making himself unrecognisable. He had little trouble in procuring a character and recommendations. Money will buy anything in Paris, and Robert had plenty, for he had hardly made use of his letter of credit. He gained admission to the club without difficulty, and soon had reason to feel at his ease.

Diego did not recognise him, for he had a hundred opportunities of waiting on him, and never did the noble Monsieur de Pancorvo pay the least attention to the footman's face.

Six months passed thus. Robert had arranged to lead a double life. He had taken lodgings in Paris, in the neighbourhood of the club ; but every night he went to the deserted house and shut himself up with the memorials of the beloved departed.

Paddy often contrived to get out and bring him news, and John Slough, too, sometimes paid a visit to Montmartre. The loneliness of the place is well adapted for mystery, and no one ever discovered these nocturnal interviews.

Towards the end of the summer the Irishman brought Robert some information which seemed favourable to his plans. Diego appeared to be in want of money. Paddy had been ordered by his master to follow certain members of the club and to observe their habits. He had special instructions to find out by what way they reached home at night.

A few days afterwards a member was stopped and robbed after playing cards at the club. He was one of those whom Paddy had been told to watch, and Robert did not doubt for a moment that he had been attacked and plundered by Diego. It was certain that he must be very much embarrassed, to have recourse to such a proceeding, and it was pretty safe to prophesy that he would not draw the line there. Robert determined to watch him more closely than ever, and catch him in the very act.

He had soon made himself acquainted with this system of night attacks. Monsieur de Pancorvo took notice every evening of the players who won, and as he had been informed by Paddy as to their habits, it was easy for him to go and lay wait for them at the corner of some deserted street. There the mode of attack which he had

learnt from Morgan served at once to throw down and throttle the unfortunate victim, who found that he had been robbed without seeing his assailant's face.

About this time an event happened which had a great deal of influence on the result of this story.

Among the members of the club was the generous man who had given Robert five hundred francs after his conviction in Provence, long before. He had not recognised, in a footman's livery, the mysterious prisoner of Cape Camarat, but the latter had not forgotten his benefactor, and was eagerly desirous of paying his debt of gratitude. An opportunity presented itself only too soon, and in quite a different manner from what he had wished.

One night Robert had a suspicion that Diego was intending to attack this benefactor, whom chance had favoured at play. He wished to save him and could not, and this powerlessness to protect him gave rise to serious reflection. He asked himself whether he had the right to allow a villain to heap crime upon crime, when it only depended on him to have him arrested. Did his vow of vengeance require that he should be silent? Robert began to doubt it, and he looked about for some means to make an end of Diego.

In order to hand him over to the law it was necessary to have proofs, for the scoundrel's position protected him against any accusation which could not be fully justified. The time had long passed for proceedings to be taken against him for the murder of Thomas Disney, and on this count the assassin was certain of impunity. George's death and that of Morgan were, for lack of proof to the contrary, accidents, and Robert was unable to furnish that proof.

But there was one death which was recent enough for the law to call Diego to account.

"If ever," Ellen had said before dying, "if ever the monster who killed my father and my sister were to threaten the life of my son, let him suffer the punishment of his crimes. The proofs are there, in my marriage chest."

George was dead, alas! and often had his father asked God's pardon for the culpable weakness which had prevented him from making use of this final weapon. But the time for regrets had passed, and that for justice had come. At last Robert opened this chest, which recalled to him the happy days of his youth. Trembling, he touched these relics of a past which had vanished without hope of return.

The chest contained Ellen's wedding wreath, her mother's Bible, a lock of George's hair, and finally some papers grown yellow with age, the singular appearance of which caused Robert considerable surprise. It was a long manuscript book similar to those used in schools. On certain pages were traced, in a firm and regular handwriting, some disjointed sentences and separate words. An inexperienced hand had endeavoured to copy them on the opposite page.

It was what they call in schools a copy-book, and it seemed as if the pupil who had used it was not very practised, for the same phrases were laboriously copied out in several different places.

On the third leaf four lines, written in large characters, attracted Robert's attention, and caused his heart to jump into his mouth. He had recognised Diego's writing, and had read these words which, after six years, still remained graven on his memory.

"I ask God's forgiveness for taking my own life.

"My body will be found in the Seine.

"I wish to be buried in the white dress which I wore on my wedding day."

They were the exact terms of the fatal letter in which Mary had told of her suicide. On the following pages the sentences were copied out many times, in unformed letters at first, then more correct, then finally quite legible; and these characters had been traced by Mary. The last page was missing. It had been cut out with a pair of scissors.

The veil was lifted at last, and after six years had elapsed light was let in upon the mysterious drama of Saint-Ouen. The vile wretch, Diego, had planned his infernal scheme with the savage patience of a spider spinning its web. The lessons which he used to give his wife formed the trap which she was destined to set for herself, and he had contrived to make his victim draw up her own death sentence.

Poor, simple Mary, after having traced for months sentences which she did not understand, had at last written legibly the letter which made her murderer secure. Robert understood all.

The day on which Diego had possession of these fatal lines he had laid wait for Mary on the banks of the Seine, the banks where she had loved to wander at night. There, profiting by Morgan's lessons, he had hidden himself—crouching like a wild beast—under the willows, and with one bound, the bound of a tiger, he had dashed his victim into the water.

This poor copy-book, full of childish scrawls, made the murderer's deed plain; these forgotten pages in Ellen's possession cried for vengeance, and, beneath these infantile sentences, Robert saw blood in every line. Ellen was right; the proof was complete.

After this discovery Robert passed the night thinking of the dead; he invoked their beloved spirits, beseeching them to inspire and sustain him in the coming struggle. When day broke he had formed a resolution.

It was necessary to act without the loss of a single day, and when Robert once more found himself in the terrible position of having to send to the galleys or the scaffold this man whom he had called his brother, once more he hesitated. In this room, peopled by the spirits of the dead, and full of memorials of those whom he was about to avenge, a voice called upon him to be the executioner as he had been the judge, and Robert

determined to challenge Diego, in order to kill him or perish by his hand.

John was surprised at his master's scruples ; but he was devoted heart and soul to him and did not argue the question.

They arranged together the details of the combat. To propose to Diego a duel under the usual conditions was not to be thought of. What motive could he give for a public meeting, short of calling up the terrible past which Robert wished to bury in the tomb ? How make of the footman Loiseau an adversary acceptable to a gentleman such as Monsieur de Pancorvo ? The combat must be without quarter ; it must be fair ; Diego must be forced to accept it. If Robert could succeed in getting him to come to his house and fight in the presence of two trustworthy seconds, all these conditions would be fulfilled.

He determined to attempt this means, and he cast about for a pretext for inducing Diego to repair to the house at Montmartre, which he had assuredly not forgotten.

One motive only would be likely to influence his degraded mind, and that motive was his ungovernable love of gold. Robert got John to write, in English, the following lines :

“A very important communication awaits Monsieur de Pancorvo, on the subject of the money left by his father-in-law, Thomas Disney. If Monsieur de Pancorvo wishes to have information on this subject, he must come to-morrow evening between eleven o'clock and midnight to the house which the late Mr. Robert Bird occupied six years ago, at Montmartre. The small door at the bottom of the garden will remain open all night, and that of the house will be opened to the name of Palmer. If Monsieur de Pancorvo fears to come alone, he can bring a servant with him.”

Robert had it signed : “A former servant in the family.” There was no doubt that this letter would excite Diego's curiosity, and probably his cupidity. In the position in which he was, any opportunity of this description had a chance of being eagerly seized upon, and although the place of meeting was liable to cause suspicion, this would be an additional reason for making him desirous of clearing up an alarming mystery.

Robert was almost certain, too, that Diego would not come alone, and that he would bring Paddy Cassan with him in preference to letting another servant into his secrets, and this was exactly what he wished. He employed the time which remained to him in preparing everything for the fatal night.

He had arms. He saw that they were in proper condition, and placed them in Ellen's room. He called John and Paddy, and allotted them their parts. John was to open the door to Diego, to show him the way to the room on the first floor, and be present at the duel. Paddy, if he accompanied his master, would be the other witness of this mortal combat.

John took home to Passy all the money that Robert had with

him, and his master placed in his hands a will in which he pointed out the way in which the money deposited in his name with Rothschild was to be employed. When all these preparations were concluded Robert had no further thought but to fight well, and, if needful, to die well. He was calm and confident, for his cause was just.

During the course of the day Paddy contrived to let him know at the club that Diego had ordered him to hold himself in readiness to accompany him that night at eleven o'clock. Robert was thus certain that the first part of his plan would be realised as he had anticipated.

Night came. He left his duties and repaired to Montmartre, where John awaited him.

All was ready. Rapiers and sabres were ready on a table in Ellen's room. All the other furniture had been taken away in order to leave sufficient room for the duel. The diver's costume which had served George as a shroud remained suspended at the far end of the room. Mary's copy-book and Disney's will were placed by the side of the swords.

The night was dark, and a storm was passing over Paris. Robert felt confident that nothing would happen to interrupt the task which he had in hand.

He dismissed John to his post on the ground floor, and knelt down to offer to God a last prayer.

A quarter to twelve had just struck by the old church clock at Montmartre, when the sharp sound of a knock at the door caused Robert to start. He closed the shutters, which he had left open so that the absence of light should not cause Diego to think that the house was uninhabited, and listened.

The door opened. Robert distinguished the steps of two men, and heard a bantering voice which he well recognised.

"Ha! it's you, John!" said Diego; "you've grown grey, my old sea-dog, but I've a good memory, and recognise you in spite of that. So you've discovered old Tom's hiding-place? I always thought the old fellow had a little pile stowed away somewhere. We must have a talk about it. But what the devil gave you the idea of making me come to this hovel on a night like this? It isn't the best spot for transacting business."

"If you will come up, sir," replied John, "there's a room upstairs where we shall be more comfortable."

"Right! come along. But no foolery, eh, old chap! I warn you that I've got a dog in my pocket that barks and bites at the same time, and here's an Irishman that knows how to use his fists."

Robert heard the click of a pistol, then the sound of steps ascending the stairs.

The door opened. Diego appeared.

Paddy followed him; John entered last and shut the door after him. Robert was standing at the end of the room, and the lamp

suspended from the ceiling left him in the shade. Diego had not seen him.

He cast a suspicious glance around, and turning abruptly to John :

"I've no time to lose," he said roughly, "tell me your business, and speak quickly, if you value your old carcase."

Robert took two steps and appeared in the full light.

He had put on a sailor's coat similar to that which he wore on the Avenger ; he had cut off his whiskers, and, on abandoning for good his footman's livery, he had put on his old expression.

Diego started back and thrust his hand quickly into the pocket of his overcoat to grasp his pistol, but before he had time to level it at Robert, John had seized his arm and torn the weapon from him.

"Ah! a trap!" said the cowardly scoundrel, already pale with terror. "Help, my brave Paddy!"

But instead of coming to his aid, the Irishman had leant against the wall and folded his arms.

Diego's position began to dawn upon him. He threw a frightened look round the room, and turned round like a wolf caught in a trap seeking some outlet.

John had placed himself before the door, which he barred with his body. Escape was impossible. The muscles of Diego's face twitched. It was plain that he was making a great effort to control himself. A few seconds afterwards he had put on an easy manner, and a forced smile played on his lips. The wretch had determined to try craft once more, and he walked up to Robert, holding out his hand.

"What! you, my poor Bird!" said he, in a voice which he tried to render composed ; "by what miracle are you still in this world?"

"God, who performed that miracle, Diego, has given me a mission, and it was to fulfil it that I summoned you here."

"A mission! Really! What mission?" said he, sneering, for he was gradually recovering his assurance.

"I have a reckoning to demand from you."

"If it has anything to do with money, you've chosen an unfortunate time, my dear fellow, for I'm not in funds, and if it's a question of the results of our operations on the Caiman, I confess that we wound up without you. What were we to do? You had fallen into the sea, and we thought you were drowned and done for. Morgan and I naturally came in for your share. But if you feel inclined, we can undertake another voyage to Brazil."

So much audacity disgusted Robert, who was not prepared for this incredible impudence ; but he was too determined, to allow himself to be put off by sarcasm.

"The reckoning which you owe me is of quite a different kind. Be silent, and listen. Five and twenty years ago Thomas Disney was cruelly butchered in his sleep. The assassin had taken his precautions well, and the crime remained unpunished. But God strikes

sooner or later. That assassin—stands here!" Robert touched him with his finger, and the wretch trembled, as if he had felt the hand of the executioner.

He tried once more to force a smile, as he said :

" You are mad, Robert ; you have forgotten that on the night of the crime we both slept at the inn at Cogolin."

" I am not mad, and I have forgotten nothing. Here is the will which you stole after committing the murder. Look : it is still stained with blood."

Diego recoiled as Robert approached him, holding out the paper, on which large red stains appeared here and there.

" No, I have forgotten nothing, and, if I needed more proof, in the village which you left by night to go and kill the man who called you his son I could find the remains of that devilish machine which sped you on your murderous path."

Diego's face blanched, and he tried to stammer some words which died away in his throat.

Robert continued :

" Six years ago Mary, my sister, the saintly creature who had chosen you—you, a wretched vagabond, without family and without fortune, in order to bestow upon you her heart and her life ; Mary perished by a terrible death. The assassin, who had set a vile trap for her, remained unpunished, and that assassin, again—stands here ! "

Diego shuddered, and cried in a choking voice :

" You lie ! you lie ! Mary committed suicide. You know it ; you read the letter."

" Look ! "

And Robert showed him the accusing copy-book, opened at the page written by his hand.

Diego's eyes started from his head, and rage transformed his features.

" The blow which killed Mary," continued Robert, " fell also upon Ellen. She died here—in this room to which I have summoned you that I may avenge her. A son remained to me. He was but a child, and he loved you—you who had made him doubly an orphan. He risked his life to go and fetch from the bottom of the sea the gold which tempted your greed. You bound him with your own hands, and you coldly waited till his agony was over to rejoin the vile accomplice who had helped you to murder him." And before the monster had time to deny it Robert seized his arm and dragged him before the diver's costume reared against the black curtain.

At this apparition Diego's hair stood on end. He uttered a hoarse cry and started back. He fancied he saw George's ghost, and he trembled in every limb.

" Let us make an end of this," said Robert. " You understand that I must kill you as you killed—one after another—all those whom I loved. I should be justified in shooting you through the

head like a mad dog. I am willing to fight you. Here are arms. Take your choice, and let us get to work quickly."

Danger had in some degree restored Diego's self-possession. He tried to gain time.

"A duel in this room!" said he, "a duel in the presence of these two respectable witnesses, who would set upon me if I had the misfortune to wound their master! I'm not at all anxious, my dear brother-in-law, to give you this satisfaction in order to ease your conscience. If you want to do away with me, kill me, for I will not fight—not here, at least; but in any other spot I should be charmed of the opportunity."

The scoundrel was playing his last card. He hoped that the idea of a forced duel would be repugnant to Robert's sense of fairness. He hoped that his brother-in law would be satisfied with the promise of a formal duel, but the trap was too clumsily set. If the wretch were to succeed in leaving the house, he would get clear off.

Robert represented the justice of God, and he had not the right to grant any favour. He looked fixedly at Diego, and said slowly:

"You have five minutes to make up your mind. In five minutes if you still refuse to fight, I shall order John to blow out your brains with the pistol which he has in his hand, and the order will be carried out, I can assure you."

John bent his head in sign of affirmation.

Robert was so firm and cool that Diego realised his position. One chance only remained: that of killing his adversary.

"Very well," said he, "I am willing to fight; but I will choose the weapons."

Robert pointed silently to the rapiers and sabres lying on the table. Diego examined them, and took a sabre.

He was used to this weapon, and often handled one on the Caiman. More than once in his brother-in-law's presence he had fenced with Morgan.

Robert, on the other hand, had had some practice with the small sword, but had never touched a sabre.

It mattered little to him. It was his wish that God should decide the combat.

Diego took off his coat and carefully placed himself in position. He stood with his back to the door, which his adversary consequently faced.

Robert told John to take out the key, and to station himself against the wall near the window. He made them both swear not to move, whatever happened.

Then he threw off his coat and stood on his guard.

His body leaning slightly forward, his arm half extended, and holding his sabre aloft, Diego prepared to act on the defensive. He was determined to leave nothing to chance. His plan was to draw Robert into the full light of the lamp hanging from the ceiling, whilst he himself remained in the shade.

But Robert saw through it. He feigned to attack the head, and, during the parade, sprang quickly on one side.

The two adversaries were then outside the circle of light. George's father had his back to the window, whilst the diver's costume was behind Diego. The conditions had become more equal.

Robert attacked briskly. He made use of the point only, without taking much trouble to parry.

At the end of two minutes he had received two cuts on the cheek and shoulder. He was losing a great deal of blood, and he felt that his strength would soon fail him. He determined to make an end.

Casting aside all precaution and all method, cutting and thrusting indiscriminately, he threw himself on his enemy. He cared little whether he died, so long as he killed George's assassin.

This furious attack did not cause Diego to lose his self-possession.

Parrying the blows, he broke, and placed his back against the wall.

Several times already Robert fancied he had touched him. He saw blood trickling down his face and chest.

The murderer was wounded.

It was then that rage seized the wretch, and, neglecting in his turn to defend himself, he rushed on Robert like a wild beast.

There was a terrible struggle for the space of half a minute.

Diego had grasped his sabre in both hands and was trying to cleave his adversary's head ; but the two were almost touching and the blows fell harmless.

Robert's blade had become fixed between the wall and his enemy's left arm, and was useless to him.

He felt Diego's heart against his breast and his breath on his cheek. The blood from their wounds mingled.

This lasted quite twenty seconds.

Then Robert crouched down, sprang back, and aimed one terrific stroke with all his remaining strength.

The point of his sabre broke against some hard body. At the same moment he felt a fearful blow on his head.

He shut his eyes and fell forward.

A backhanded blow had caught him on the left side of his skull. As for Diego he had sunk down an inert mass.

He was dead.

His opponent's sabre had passed through his heart.

Robert remained insensible for nearly an hour. When he recovered consciousness he was in the room on the ground-floor, whither John and Paddy had carried him. There was not a moment to lose before leaving the scene of the combat, for the day was about to break.

Robert's wounds were not very dangerous ; but the blood which he had lost had weakened him considerably, and he had great difficulty in walking. Leaning on the arms of his two friends, he succeeded, however, in gaining the street. A belated cab was passing,

and the driver agreed to take them to the Passy Barrier, from whence they walked to Slough's house.

The night was far advanced, and they met no one. For the time being, at least, Robert was safe. His plan was to leave France with John and Paddy; but he was still too weak to travel, and he was in absolute need of a few days' rest and attention.

Grave scruples, moreover, had occurred to him. He had no doubt as yet of the lawfulness of the terrible act which he had committed, but he began to be anxious about the consequences. The papers which might have afforded a clue to the truth had been removed by John; but in the hurry of departure he had been obliged to leave many things too awkward to carry away. The diver's costume and the weapons were still in the room where the duel had been fought, and Diego's body lay on the floor where it had fallen.

The police would assuredly believe that a murder had been committed. The false Pancorvo's position in society and the mystery which surrounded his death would excite the curiosity of the public, and it was only to be expected that the machinery of the law would be actively set in motion. It was hardly likely that anything would be discovered to connect Robert and his friends with the crime, and, besides, he had no fear for himself.

But innocent men might be suspected, accused, convicted, perhaps, and the thought of this caused him much more apprehension than the necessity of being himself called to account. If this misfortune happened, Robert's conscience would not permit him to hesitate.

Besides all this, an inner feeling prompted him not to take upon himself the whole responsibility of this death. He determined to send John to gather information. The old sailor was quite unknown at Montmartre, so he could without danger mingle in the groups attracted by the occurrence, and listen to the talk which went on.

Robert made up his mind at the same time to read all the papers, in the hope that they would keep him informed as to the course of the inquiry.

It was a lucky inspiration. The same evening John Slough came back very sad, and his master had great difficulty in making him give an account of what he had learnt. Robert's fears had been only too well founded. Several persons had already been arrested, and his grief at having caused innocent people to be suspected was very great.

A deep sorrow was reserved for him, as if God had willed to punish him for having shed blood, even to carry out the most legitimate vengeance.

The man who was accused of the Montmartre crime, he whose honour and life were imperilled by the gravest suspicion, was the generous stranger whom Robert had formerly tried to save from his assailants in the street. A fatal chain of facts had put the police on the wrong track. The night upon which Monsieur de Pancorvo

had determined to attack the man to whom the prisoner of Cape Camarat had vowed eternal gratitude was the starting-point of this sad series of mistakes. On that night Robert, as the footman Loiseau, had been present at the club and had guessed Diego's plans. He had made up his mind to assist his benefactor ; but, in order to avoid being recognised, he had to confine himself to following at a distance the man whom he was anxious to protect. He hoped that the sound of his steps and the sight of another man would frighten Diego, and prevent him from venturing on an attack.

Unfortunately the plan was not successful.

The false Pancorvo had time to bring his victim to the ground and plunder him, and Robert was forced to make off, so as to avoid recognition and put into execution the only service which it was in his power to render to the man whom he had not been able to rescue.

He forwarded to his benefactor a sum equal to that of which he had been robbed, thinking in this way to make some return without betraying his identity. This act was followed by deplorable consequences, and if Robert had been able to foresee them it would have been a thousand times better if he had refrained from performing it.

The curiosity excited by this anonymous restitution prompted this most honourable man to put himself on the track of the so-called Loiseau, and a most fatal coincidence brought it about that this man was in the garden at Montmartre on the night of the tragic occurrence which has just been related. A wrong clue had capped the mistake, and was capable of causing a grave miscarriage of justice. Robert's benefactor had been arrested on the terrible charge of murder, and if Providence did not intervene and enlighten the magistrate an innocent man might perish.

Robert had not, at any rate, to reproach himself with having hesitated at this weighty crisis. His mind was made up at once.

He determined before all, were it at the peril of his own life, to save him who had been unjustly accused ; but although he had made up his mind to sacrifice himself, he could not allow the friends who had assisted him to share his fate.

Accordingly, it was necessary to find means to get John Slough and Paddy Cassan out of the way, and wait, before giving himself up, until they were in safety on the other side of the Channel. Robert did not lose an instant. He made the faithful John write to one of his old comrades at Whitstable who owned a boat which was famed for her sailing qualities. She was to leave England on the receipt of the letter, and cruise about near Boulogne. Slough was confident that his instructions would be faithfully carried out ; but the voyage from the Thames to Boulogne demanded some little time.

Robert utilised the delay. The arrest of the generous man who was suffering in his place was recent enough to be unknown to his friends. Robert succeeded by various methods in contriving that

this annoying misadventure should not be noised abroad. Before liberating an innocent man he took measures to save his reputation, and he was successful.

The time came to repair to Boulogne. The Whitstable boat was standing off the coast, and Robert's wounds were in a fair way to heal. His shoulder, which had been grievously slashed by Diego's sabre, still caused him much pain ; but, if need were, he could bear the journey.

He went with his two friends, in order himself to see to their safe departure. They arrived without accident at Boulogne, and the same evening the fugitives stood together on the shore at Portel, within gunshot of the boat which was to rescue them.

There was enacted a touching scene, the last in this long drama. John and Paddy heard with despair Robert's determination to give himself up to justice. They could not understand the honourable scruples and the generous feeling which prompted their master to accept the responsibility of the bloody deed at Montmartre, and they had only consented to fly because they thought that they could persuade Robert at the last moment to escape with them to England. When the moment to bid farewell arrived poor John could not control himself.

"Master," he cried, falling at Robert's feet, "in God's name, come with us ; do not leave your old servant like this. You know well that he would a hundred times rather share a French prison with you than pass his old age far from his master."

"It is impossible, my dear Slough," said Robert, hardly controlling his emotion. "I cannot allow an innocent man to perish, and your presence is necessary at Whitstable. And, besides, justice will give an ear to me. How can I be condemned ? In a few months we shall meet again."

John shook his head and burst into tears. His grief had communicated itself to Paddy, who clung, weeping, to Robert's clothes.

At this moment a group of men appeared at the top of the cliff, of whose hostile intentions there could be no doubt. They hailed the fugitives with threatening gestures, and prepared to descend and surround them. This sight restored all Robert's energy.

"Not a word more," said he, in a firm voice ; "I alone know what I have to do. To hesitate to obey me would be to compromise my design, to ruin me, perhaps. Throw yourselves into the sea without losing a minute, gain the vessel, and, once at Whitstable, await my instructions. Your hand, John, and farewell."

The old sailor threw himself weeping into his master's arms, and poor Paddy, who had stood aloof, timidly seized Robert's hand and covered it with tears. A minute later the two faithful servants were swimming with all their strength towards the vessel, which they soon reached, and in less than half-an-hour the white sail of the sloop had disappeared in the evening mist.

Robert remained alone on the shore, and had only a few seconds to find means to escape from his pursuers. Flight was for this man, who was about to hand himself over to justice, an imperious necessity for the moment. As a matter of fact, if he allowed himself to be arrested, it would be an impossibility for him to convince his judges that he had not attempted to escape. In order that the innocent man whom he wished to deliver should benefit by Robert's generous resolution, it was necessary that this resolution should appear spontaneous.

Robert wished to be able to say : "I could have escaped, and I did not, because I wanted to save a man who has been unjustly accused. If the death of Monsieur de Pancorvo is in your eyes a crime, I alone am guilty. I am here ; take me, try me, condemn me, if needful ; but release the guiltless man."

It was therefore imperative to escape at any price ; but escape was almost impossible. The tide had been coming in rapidly whilst Robert was tearing himself away from his friends. The road was still open towards the little harbour of Portel ; but the police commissary and his men were approaching along it. To follow the shore in that direction meant certain capture. Towards Boulogne his retreat was cut off by a promontory, which ran out to sea, and the waves were already breaking in spray upon the rocks.

It was too late : escape was impossible. What was he to do ? For a moment Robert abandoned hope, and determined stoically to await death on this treacherous shore. The terrible agony of a man lost amongst the waves, who sees death gradually approaching, and dies by slow torture—this was what Robert was about to face without flinching. He threw himself on a rock which the cliff overhung, and which the waves were almost licking, and, his head in his hands, he began to think.

His last hour was approaching, then, and he longed for it, as the tired traveller longs for repose. All those whom he had loved were dead, and he had avenged them. His task was accomplished, and life had no further attraction for him. He was letting his thoughts wander thus, forgetting that, at that very moment, perhaps, the fate of an innocent man, whom he had it in his power to save, was being decided.

A chance called him to himself.

A small stone detached from the cliff struck him on the cheek. He raised his head and saw that this stone had rolled from under the feet of a goat which was browsing on the herbage clinging to the steep slopes of the promontory. The capricious beast was climbing up a hardly perceptible path, and, guided by its instinct, was skirting the abyss with marvellous agility, and gradually approaching the summit.

God had once more manifested Himself. He had made use of this grain of sand to show Robert the path of safety.

Where a goat had gone a man might, perhaps, go as well. To be

crushed to atoms by a terrible fall, or to die a lingering death beneath the waves. Such was the alternative, and Robert did not hesitate a moment.

Before attempting this last chance he examined the cliff with that keenness of vision which danger gives. With the practised eye of a sailor he noted the smallest ledges, the tiniest tufts of herbage, and traced out in imagination the path which the goat had followed. It must have turned at that rock, leapt on yonder jutting stone, clung by its teeth to those shrubs.

Before beginning to climb Robert knew where to take each step. His lofty voyage was mapped out in his brain like the plan of a battle.

He rose and marched on the enemy.

This enemy was the steep, bristling, menacing cliff. He attacked it resolutely. His barely healed wound pained him much, especially at first. Now he had to seize with his left hand a tottering stone, now plant his feet firmly on a slippery ridge, and, taking a branch of wild broom in his teeth, raised himself by a prodigious muscular effort. Gradually, however, his exertions warmed his right arm; his contracted muscles regained their use, and he was able to make use of both his hands. He climbed, trembling on the edge of a precipice, leaving nothing to chance, making no movement without assuring himself that the ground would bear him. Sometimes he stopped to recover his breath, and looked down at the waves which were furiously lashing the foot of the cliff beneath him. Occasionally one larger than the rest dashed its spray over him, as if to seize the prey which was escaping from it. Composed in the presence of this impotent rage, he raised his eyes and saw above him the head of his friend the goat. It was climbing up unconcernedly, retreating from the unaccustomed noise which Robert was making twenty feet below, and leading him gradually to the summit.

The night was clear, and its white coat guided the unfortunate man lost between the sky and sea, as the polar star guides the pilot across the ocean. One final spring landed the goat on firm soil; it halted for an instant on the edge of the cliff, as if to bid farewell to a fugitive whose life it had just saved, and disappeared, uttering its plaintive cry. Robert was not far behind. He reached, in his turn, the top of the precipice, and fell down overcome with fatigue and excitement. Lying full length on the delicate and abundant herbage which stretched in the moonlight as far as the eye could reach, he thanked God and collected his strength.

Physical and moral energy were more necessary to him than ever. He was saved from the sea and the precipice; but his sacred task was still far from being accomplished. He must reach Paris. He must arrive there alone and free. Beyond all doubt the Boulogne police were on his track, and were scouring the shore and the country. Robert was wondering what fresh miracle would deliver him out of their hands, when the sound of wheels and bells attracted his attention. The Portel road crossed the downs, and

along it was travelling, in the direction of Boulogne, one of those low vehicles which are let out to excursionists. The moon gave enough light to show that the driver was alone.

Robert had an inspiration. He rose, re-arranged his clothes as best he could, ran swiftly across the downs, and overtook the trap just at the top of a little hill.

"Driver, a hundred sous to take me to Boulogne," said he, feigning an English accent.

It was too good an offer for the driver to refuse, and a minute afterwards Robert was descending at full trot the road which leads to the Liane Bridge. In half an hour he would be in Boulogne, in the midst of the police who were in search of him.

The moment was a decisive one.

"Your horse is a good one," said he to the driver; "but he couldn't go far at this pace."

"Not far!" replied the man, whose coachman's pride was offended. "He'd take you to Abbeville in seven hours, and that's nearly sixty miles."

"I should like to see it," said Robert, in the most careless voice that he could command.

"You've only got to say the word, master," said the driver, vexed at the doubt cast on his horse, and tempted by the hope of a big profit.

"Very well, there are a hundred francs for you if we are at Abbeville before five o'clock to-morrow morning."

The driver looked at him without being particularly astonished, accustomed as he was to the eccentricities of the numerous English people who live at Boulogne.

"Yes," continued Robert, "it's a bet that I've made;" and he placed five gold pieces in the driver's hand, who pocketed them joyfully, and, as soon as he had reached the bottom of the hill, turned to the right and took the road to Paris.

He was not wrong. His horse, a sturdy brute of that Boulogne breed which was formerly so much sought after, did his nine miles an hour easily. At midnight they were at Montreuil, and shortly before five o'clock they drove into Abbeville. There the driver declared that Robert must get out, since, if he offered him a thousand francs, his horse could not go an hour longer.

"I'll buy another horse, and you can drive me," said the pretended Englishman.

"Where to, milord?"

"To Paris. I'll give you three hundred francs for yourself."

"Ha! ha! the bet again, I suppose. When must you be in Paris, to win it?"

"To-morrow morning, by daybreak."

The offer was too tempting to be refused. The driver engaged, with the help of a horse-dealer—a friend of his—to procure a horse, which Robert paid a high price for, but which proved to be an ex-

cellent one. The next morning at six o'clock Robert arrived at the Saint-Denis Barrier.

Success was within his grasp. He had already told his driver to take the road to Passy. He wanted to make some final preparations at Slough's house before going to the Palais de Justice.

The officers carelessly examined the carriage ; but two policemen whom chance had brought to the custom-house had their suspicions of this strange conveyance. One of them placed his hand on the reins, and the other advanced to request the traveller to get out.

The moment was a critical one : one second's hesitation might ruin all. With a sudden movement Robert seized the reins in his wounded hand and with the other one struck the horse such a sharp blow that the beast started off at full speed, throwing to the ground the policeman who had hold of the reins.

It was a headlong race ; the custom-house officers and policemen followed, crying : "Stop !" but passers-by were rare, and the swiftness of the horse was such that he had soon distanced all pursuers. On turning a corner Robert, having applied one last cut to the horse, who this time took the bit between his teeth, threw the reins to the driver and sprang out, at the risk of breaking his neck.

The horse continued its mad career as far as the Boulevard Saint-Denis, where it fell exhausted, and the unfortunate Boulogne driver, having lost his wits at this strange adventure, was arrested, and dragged before the magistrate as an accomplice of the Montmartre assassin.

Robert, however, had picked himself up after his intentional fall. The street where it had happened was deserted, and he walked, without any one noticing him, as far as a cab-rank. It was none too soon : his strength was exhausted ; his wound had opened again ; another hour, perhaps, and he would have succumbed beneath the weight of fatigue and grief, before having attained his object.

"I will die, if need be, at the feet of the magistrate," said the wretched man to himself ; "but I shall at least have given myself up of my own free will."

"To the Palais de Justice ! "

He had just sufficient strength to call out these words to a cabman, who looked with astonishment mingled with pity at this man who was so pale, and so eager to make his way to the dread home of justice.

The task was accomplished.

The worthy magistrate, who saw the man whose life has just been related fall at his feet, has assuredly not forgotten this cry, which issued from his heart :

"It was I—I alone, who killed Monsieur de Pancorvo," groaned the unhappy man, who longed for death.

Was this the confession of a criminal ?

Led astray by appearances, the police thought so ; and in the

presence of this man's obstinate silence they were forced to do their duty. But God, who looses oaths and opens all men's hearts, has permitted that the truth should be manifested. He chose this instrument to save a despairing man, and enlighten your minds.

* * * * *

"I have related to you," said the chaplain, "the life of the unhappy man whom an incredible fatality has placed in this dock. I promised him not to defend him, and I have not defended him.

"Your sense of right will judge him.

"My task is accomplished, and yours begins."

A long murmur accompanied the venerable man's words, who sat down, worn out with fatigue and emotion, by the side of him whom he had saved.

A sympathetic thrill ran through the audience, and one could read on the faces of the jurymen an unanimous acquittal. The president himself, seized with profound pity, needed to recall the gravity of his solemn functions in order not to yield to the general movement, and it was in a voice of emotion that he addressed the prisoner.

"Robert," said he—and in the employment of this name it was easy to guess a benevolent feeling—"you have heard the story of the respected priest who has been good enough to accept the painful task of explaining your acts. My duty compels me to ask you whether you have anything to add to statements which the court accepts without doubt, but which must be confirmed out of your own mouth."

Ever since Abbé Guérin had ceased speaking, Robert, his face bathed with tears, had been clasping in his own hands that of his generous deliverer, and seemed to have forgotten that he was before his judges.

The president's voice recalled him to himself; he rose, made an effort to overcome his emotion, and addressing the court and jury, he spoke as follows :

"Yes, the noble protector whom God has raised up to rescue me from infamy has told you the truth, but he has not told you the whole truth.

"You know now my life and my troubles; you know how I was brought to shed blood, and, whatever your verdict may be, I shall submit to it with resignation.

"It only remains for me to tell you what my protector kept silence upon; it remains for me to tell you how the holy priest whom you have just heard has had his share in the terrible misfortunes of my distracted life.

"In the joyous days of youth and hope, when I returned to Whitstable after having finished my studies at Paris, I took with me the dearest of my French friends.

"For six years Gabriel Guérin had shared my joys and troubles, he had comforted me in my grief; he had defended me against brutal attacks and perfidious slander. He was rather older than myself; he was stronger; he was cleverer, and, above all, he was better.

"He was welcomed at Whitstable like a son of the house, and for three months he lived our life, that peaceful life of the cottage which Disney's two daughters at that time filled with their innocent gaiety. Gabriel loved Mary with the whole force of his soul. I was the confidant of this passion, which was as pure as the heart in which it had been born, and I already dreamt of the union of my sister by adoption with him whom I called my brother from France.

"Mary's fatal passion for Diego destroyed this hope, and blasted my life. It is no part of my duty to relate to you here the anguish of the man who has acquainted you with the terrible events which have brought me before you.

"Gabriel had a noble heart. He suffered in silence, and, after a struggle lasting several years, he cast himself into the arms of religion, that great consolation of the afflicted. I learnt that beneath the cassock of the priest he had gone to seek a martyr's crown in distant lands, and the catastrophes of my own life had caused me to forget the friend of my youth, when Providence brought him to my bedside.

"I wished to die, and I accepted infamy as an expiation. Gabriel commanded me to live, and insisted on justifying me before you. May God's will be done!"

Robert here sat down, and resumed his gloomy and resigned attitude. There was a long pause.

A feeling of anxious curiosity took possession of the public and the judges, and every one was wondering what fresh turn this trial would take, a trial which was, without any doubt, unique in criminal annals.

But the law is impassible, and unmoved justice dwells in spheres inaccessible to the feelings of human hearts. To absolve, as to condemn, it demands proofs. The chaplain's tale had caused the case to wear quite a different aspect. The public prosecutor applied for a remand until the next sitting of the court, and the request was granted.

The crowd dispersed, silent and thoughtful, like as when after the representation of some touching drama the moved spectators go away without exchanging impressions.

The prisoner returned to the gloomy cells of the Conciergerie. He could now await without impatience the day which would set him at liberty; the day which was just over had restored to him his honour.

The new inquiry which was opened in consequence of Abbé Guérin's revelations was long. However great was the respect

which the chaplain inspired, however weighty was the authority of his word, a vast amount of retrospective evidence had to be sifted. Fortunately, no serious difficulties arose. In the first place it was easily proved that Monsieur de Pancorvo was no other than Diego Palmer, and Morgan's existence was established in the most indubitable manner.

The marvellous memory of the detective Jottrat was of the greatest assistance in investigating the past life of two scoundrels who had been forgotten for so many years. He had in former days witnessed many bloody episodes in which Morgan had played the principal part, and the exploits of the notorious *Chrob ou Horob* band were still fresh in his mind.

The investigations went further back, and extended to all the parts of the world in which the long drama of Robert's life had been enacted.

The murder at the *Bastide-Rouge*, in Provence ; the inexplicable suicide of Mary at Saint-Ouen ; the conviction of the vagabond of the sea in 1846 ; each of these facts had left its trace in the always open repertory of the police. The chaplain's story fitted in with the information buried away in those formidable archives, as at the end of a book of adventures one half of a gold piece fits in with the other, for the purpose of establishing the hero's identity.

Summoned by a letter from Abbé Guérin, John and Paddy returned to place themselves at the disposal of the French authorities. The innocent men had no need to preconcert their defence, and their evidence was Robert's best justification. They were allowed to be at liberty, and as soon as the inquiry terminated they were permitted to visit in his prison the man charged with the crime of Montmartre, who was soon about to become Robert Bird again.

At last, after three months of captivity, the solemn day of the assizes arrived. The trial was a veritable triumph for Robert. His innocence, which had been recognized for some time past, was made plainer by the examination of each of the few witnesses who were summoned before the court. He was acquitted, after a few minutes' deliberation, and it is needless to add that the verdict was unanimous.

EPILOGUE.

Of Diego's two miserable accomplices, one starved himself to death in prison, with the passive courage of Orientals ; the other was sentenced, for highway robbery with violence, to twenty years' hard labour, without a confession or a complaint escaping him.

Free, and without a stain on his character, Robert hastened to leave France ; but, before doing so for ever, he wished to clasp the hand of the man whom chance had so strangely connected with the events of his life.

This satisfaction was denied him. After the happy ending to his terrible adventure, Henri de Servon had gone for a long trip in Spain and Algeria, and he had not yet returned.

Robert departed with his two friends, for he could now bestow this name on poor Paddy, who had shown unequalled devotion in this sad crisis. His mission of avenging George and Ellen was accomplished, but he had still a duty to fulfil. It was his wish to unite all those whom he had loved in one tomb. Accordingly, he went to fetch the dead dispersed in distant lands, and after two months of mournful pilgrimages, the remains of Disney and those of George reposed in the churchyard at Whitstable, by the side of Ellen and Mary.

There was still a considerable sum remaining to him from the Avenger, and this gold, which had been the cause of so much crime, burnt his hands. He divided it into two portions, which he bestowed on the poor of Paris and London. He sold the Montmartre house, and had enough remaining to finish his days in the cottage with the faithful Slough. Paddy remained with them to wait on them and close their eyes.

“Misfortune has broken me down before age,” wrote Robert to Servon, on leaving Paris for ever, “and when my old friend John leaves this world, I hope that I shall not be long in following him. You, who gave me a hand in the prison at Var, I hope that you will forgive me for having dragged you, in spite of myself, to the edge of the fatal precipice down which I was rolling. Live happily, and think sometimes of him whom you called The Nameless Man.”

The Vicomte de Servon received this letter on his return, more than six months after Robert Bird’s departure. It reminded him of the singular adventures in which chance had mixed him up a good deal more than he could have desired. He had almost forgotten them already, and he did not bear the least grudge against poor Robert; but he was still anxious on one point—the means of repaying the sixty-five thousand francs which he had received from the pretended Loiseau.

He had kept them at the time because it was impossible for him to do otherwise, but he knew now the name of the lender, a fact which quite altered the situation.

Accordingly he wrote a letter to Robert, enclosing, with many thanks, a draft on Messrs. Robinson & Fleming, bankers, London. A week afterwards the draft was returned to him, with a very polite note from John Slough, the executor of Robert Bird, who had died of decline a month before. Mr. Slough wrote that his friend had appointed him sole legatee, and that, by a codicil of his will, he begged the Vicomte Henry de Servon to keep the sum of sixty-five thousand francs as a *souvenir*. The old sailor added that Mr. Robert Bird had been buried in the family vault, and that

all the inhabitants of the village had accompanied him to his last home.

Servon had come off second best in this generous struggle, and he was obliged to take the money. He promised himself to devote the sum to establishing a fund for distribution every year amongst the widows and orphans of Whitstable divers. He determined also to visit the cottage where poor Robert lived, and the cemetery where he rests.

In the meantime, he went to see the Montmartre house. The garden had not ceased to resemble a virgin forest, but the house had lost all its poesy. It had been converted into a photographer's studio.

The Sorelle rocks still keep the Avenger's gold. There are enough millions there to tempt adventurous spirits, and the viscount sometimes gave it a thought after a run of bad luck. But he dreaded sea sickness, and knew nothing about diving.

He contented himself with making a pilgrimage to Whitstable, where the best oysters in England are to be had.

END OF "THE NAMELESS MAN."

A PROVINCIAL STORY.

IF I were not afraid of seeming to give a paradoxical form to the expression of a simple and true sentiment, I should say that lassitude is the greatest blessing of provincial life. I mean that profound and irredeemable lassitude which by its violence sets reverie free within us, and initiates us to the pleasures of resignation and of martyrdom. In Paris, lassitude can only be a personal vice for which one becomes responsible, and which by that very fact irritates us against ourselves. But in the provinces, it is an absolute law, an atmospheric influence, one is not to blame for submitting to it, it is good taste to avow it. The soul, while resigning itself to it, seeks compensations within itself; it wishes to react against its weariness, by means of memory or hope, and it thus arrives at avenging itself by picking up very immaterial, very quintessential pleasures, it is true, but pleasures of which the reality cannot be denied.

It is especially when one has the happiness of boring one's self in one's native part of the country that the malicious melancholy of which I speak finds its account, and that at the bottom of the internal grumbling of one's spirit there can be distinctly heard that sardonic laugh, that vengeful slander, the charms of which it is difficult to analyze.

The town of Troyes, capital of the department of the Aube, and formerly capital of the province of Champagne, satisfies all the nauseous conditions which make a provincial town a place of exile. The triviality of its aspect, the activity which absorbs its inhabitants, all invite you to a dreamless somnolence. Pretty walks are not wanting, but they are neither frequented enough to assist the exchange of thoughts, nor deserted enough for solitary reverie.

Fifteen years ago Troyes was an obscure and dirty town, encumbered with rickety and mouldering buildings. Now the walls have been pulled down, the streets broadened, and under the pretext of cutting a canal, a frog pond has been established in the centre of the place in order to give it the illusory aspect of a port. Troyes is not so ugly as it was, but on the other hand it is common; and modern buildings with their staring new whitewash break upon the harmony of the venerable old houses.

This capital of Champagne appears to have had at all times the reputation that I claim for it to-day, and the old counts who hon-

oured it as their principal town took care not to live in it. Thibault, the versifier, would have felt ill at ease there ; and Provins, that imitation of Jerusalem which the Crusaders saluted on their return from their expeditions, as reminding them of the holy city, Provins, with its roses, its mountain, and its picturesque aspect, was the favourite residence of those witty suzerains.

What, indeed, can we think of a capital the very authenticity of whose claims has been seriously and plausibly contested ? Troyes had preserved such scant traces of its antique prosperity that learned men have been able to pretend that Rheims, Chalons, or Provins had been the capital of Champagne.

Troyes has a theatre, but people patronise it as little as possible, and a local proverb says that the actors come there in pumps and go away in sabots. It has also a literary society and an agricultural society, which hate nothing more than to get themselves talked about. So much for the intellectual life. As for the inhabitants of Troyes, I will say nothing about them. There would be too much humility in speaking ill of them, and too much vanity in praising them. My sarcasm would be like suicide, my panegyrics like egotism. It suffices to say that most of them seem contented with their lot, and that I shall doubtless appear a great offender in their eyes in thus confessing the *ennui* of the native soil.

During an enforced residence of four years in this stupefying locality, I kept my warmth and movement within myself only by frequent walks and intellectual gymnastics, which were indeed obligatory. In Paris, journalism wears out the imagination ; in the provinces, on the contrary, this continual marking time of reflection guarantees you against ankylosis.

During my daily strolls on the *Mail*, the principal promenade, I had got into the habit of counting the trees and the benches and noting all the peculiarities of the ground ; I believe that I should at last have counted the grains of sand, such is the force of boredom. The nurses, the old retired shopkeepers, the idlers, few enough it is true, who used to animate the promenade with their presence were all known to me. I used to find them at the same hours, accomplishing the same number of turns, stopping at the same spots, sitting on the same benches, performing, in short, with admirable regularity the automatic functions of which provincial life is made up.

One old woman in particular by her punctuality, by a sort of mystery spread around her person, by her costume, and by the visible preoccupation of her mind, had at last awakened my curiosity and become quite necessary to my daily promenades. She was the indispensable accessory of the gloomy pathways. I could not understand the *Mail* without her presence.

This worthy and mysterious lady was a septuagenarian. Her face was yellow and hollow ; her eyes were bright ; her long hooked nose seemed to bite her mouth which could no longer bite ; her chin was square ; her white hair affected, on each side of her temples, three

little curls that escaped from under her bonnet like three wisps of horsehair out of an unsewn cushion. A marvellous black silk bonnet of chimerical shape sheltered this grimacing face, which was prevented from being ridiculous by its air of kindness and perfect serenity ; it was only singular. A shawl of a sort of salmon-colour was stretched over the sharp angles which must have formed her shoulders, elbows, and hips ; a puce-coloured dress, very narrow, but trimmed with a little flounce, came down to within three inches of her feet. A large green bag of the kind formerly known as reticules or *ridicules* swung at her side, and betrayed by the sound it gave the presence of the keys, the snuff-box, and the spectacle-case which it contained. The old woman was very active, and trotted along the *Mail* with a sharp and sure step. Sometimes she stopped, sat on one of the stone benches, took a little tortoise-shell snuff-box, adorned with a portrait, out of her bag, stuffed her nose vivaciously with snuff, and fell into profound meditation.

This indefatigable old lady, whom I used to meet every day, puzzled me. The regularity of her movements and her concentrated reserve indicated a craze of some sort. And yet her sharp and direct glance excluded all thought of madness. She never stopped to talk. People saluted her, but she barely recognised their politeness by an almost invisible curtsey. There was something of the pride and disdain of unrecognised genius about her.

This misanthropic old woman, with such a kind and calm face, seemed to me an interesting enigma. I inquired and found that her name was Argine Picquet. She was unmarried ; and at the fêtes of the Virgin she always claimed with vivacity the right to carry the banner. On such occasions her puce-coloured attire gave place to a white dress, her black hat to a veil, and nothing was more odd and at the same time more touching than to see this more than septuagenarian virgin proudly leading the charming procession of the young sisterhoods.

Some people said that there was a grand love story at the bottom of Mademoiselle Picquet's celibacy, others thought that she was a repentant gambler. She was sometimes surprised at her house with packs of cards in her hands. Perhaps, however, she studied cartomancy, and was simply a fortune-teller ! Little satisfied with the information that I had obtained, but more excited than ever, I determined to penetrate the mystery myself. In my promenades I affected to rest wherever Mademoiselle Picquet rested ; I used to go and sit upon the same bench ; and thus in spite of her preoccupation after a few days the little old woman noticed my assiduity. She cast a mocking side-glance at me, as if to ask me if I was blind ; then seeing that I was disconcerted and was determined not to leave, Mademoiselle Argine turned brusquely towards me and said :

“ Eh ! eh ! one would say that you were courting me ; you are compromising me ! ”

Then she laughed with a little dry and joyous laugh that danced

in her throat like a shuttlecock on a battledore. I joined frankly in this hilarity, and seeing such true and intelligent kindness in the sharp and malicious eyes of the old maid, I determined to confess my curiosity, excusing myself by the sympathy which our habits of walking out and our isolation established between us.

Mademoiselle Argine became serious.

"Ah ! ah ! so you are curious like the others," she said. " You want to know who I am, why I always walk about alone, without a poodle-dog or any old folks at my side ? And when I have told you all about it you will laugh, won't you ? "

I protested the contrary.

"After all, what does it matter ?" she continued ; " if you laugh at old age you will not add a very new or a very unexpected disillusion to all the disillusionments that have struck me in my life, but you will have been guilty of a bad action, for which your conscience will doubtless reproach you, and which God will perhaps punish."

I was surprised at the solemnity with which these words were pronounced. Mademoiselle Picquet remarked my astonishment.

"I dare say they have told you that I am mad," she continued ; "and they are right, for I do not understand the world at all. I am ninety years of age, and I only appear to be seventy ; well, sir, it is thanks to my will that I do not grow older any faster. Oh ! do not smile, and do not think that I imagine that I can cheat Father Time. By what I have just said I mean that I command my emotions, and that I have regulated my wants. I am a great mathematician, such as you see me, and I shall not die until I have found the solution of my problem."

"What is it ?" I asked, feeling sure that Mademoiselle Picquet was speaking metaphorically.

"You are very inquisitive," she replied ; "and besides, one must have lived, as I have, on algebra and calculations, in order to enter into my fancies and ambitions."

This time I was confounded. It was decidedly of a mathematical problem that the old lady was talking. I felt a terrible fear. I was at the mercy of some maniac, and I had exposed myself to confidences doubly unintelligible, mathematics always having been a mystery for me.

Mademoiselle Picquet had taken from her bag her tortoise-shell snuff-box, and snuffing voluminous pinches of snuff up her nose, and drawing it up with a sort of savage snort, "Sir," she resumed, after a few minutes' reflection, "this is a very bad place for talking, but if you are not too much afraid of a *tête-à-tête* in the chamber of an old maid like myself, I shall expect you this evening."

I readily accepted the invitation, and that very evening I knocked at the door of my new acquaintance. Why should I not confess that my heart beat a little ? Does curiosity produce the same emotion as love ? Alas ! in many cases is there so great a difference between the two feelings ?

I found Mademoiselle Picquet seated in an arm chair upholstered in old tapestry. Two turtle doves, in fine point, a little faded, were caressing each other behind her back. A large portrait of a personage of the seventeenth century was hung up opposite the fire place, on the wall. Various games were arranged on a chest of drawers. There was a loto, a draught-board, and a box of chessmen ; and in a corner a tric-trac table also bore witness to the various tastes of Mademoiselle Picquet. Some scientific books lay open on a little table, within easy reach of the arm chair. Everything in the room announced the order and cleanliness, and at the same time the oddness of the occupant, and the thought that my heroine was simply a fortune-teller came back to me with greater persistency.

"Tell me why you desire so much to know me ?" she said, when I sat down at her side. "Well, you will be taken in, for I am neither an old princess in disguise, nor a fairy, as my hooked nose might lead you to suppose ; I am simply an old maid, a little crazy. But that which astonishes you in me has not originated with me. It is simply inherited. There was a great man in my family. I resemble him, they say, in looks ; I have wished to resemble him otherwise. His memory cast me into the way of certain ideas, from which I am afraid I shall never free myself. Yes, sir, there, look at that portrait."

As she spoke thus, with an accent of pride, Mademoiselle Picquet showed me the large portrait that I had already noticed.

"That fine smiling head is the venerable head of my ancestor of the third generation, Jean Picquet, mayor and notary of Troyes under the well-beloved King Louis XIII, and one of the greatest mathematicians of his time. He was in correspondence with all the geometers, and as in those days there was no true science without a bit of infatuation leading the thoughts of the learned astray into the regions of the impossible, my ancestor sometimes quitted the earth and raised himself by means of his squares and compasses as high as the stars, which he took the pains to consult on human events. He participated in the publication of the 'Almanach of great predictions,' published by Pierre Arrivey, the younger, a mathematician, astronomer, astrologer, caster of horoscopes, also a talented native of Champagne. But you see that a notary is not by his nature essentially predisposed to astrological vagaries, and if my ancestor made calculations about meteors, it was more by way of amusement and relaxation than with the object of drawing rigorous consequences. A man who draws up contracts and wills has his wings leaded, and does not lose himself in the blue sky. Maitre Jean Picquet was then a very learned man and a charming wit. Cardinal de Richelieu consulted him about the dyke of La Rochelle, and on several other matters."

"But my ancestor's title to eternal esteem is the following : Until the time of Colbert our old town of Troyes was a great place for manufacturing cards ; it shared with Rouen the privilege of making

playing-cards for the whole kingdom. The taxes that have been imposed since then have ruined this industry ; but in the days of my ancestor it was very flourishing. Maitre Jean Picquet was a meditative notary whose studies did not render him either morose or brutal, and who did not think that because he was learned he had no need to be an amiable companion. Are there still notaries and learned men of that kind ? Living in the intimacy of booksellers, printers, and card-makers, he formed the project of utilising some mathematical rules for the advantage of the amusement of the world ; and one night he shut himself up in his study with a pack of cards and passed half the night in deep reflection. His wife heard him walking about, counting first on his fingers and then with counters, going to and fro, and ejaculating all the while. When he came to join Madame Jean Picquet in her four-post bed he kissed her on each cheek, saying : ‘Rejoice, my love, your husband has discovered America !’ This was an inventor’s boast, sir, but there was some truth in it ! He had indeed discovered a world, a world of calculations, delights, and emotions. The next morning Maitre Jean Picquet gave a holiday to his clerks, and amused himself by making his apprentice study the ingenious and profound combination which he had invented on the previous night. Until his time cards had served merely as the instruments of chance. My ancestor was the first who introduced calculation and combination into hitherto uncertain games, and, thanks to him, cards could become not only a source of real amusement for weary or giddy minds, but a serious and ever-new source of delicate delights for grave and reflective spirits. Thanks to Maitre Jean Picquet, we can play cards for the game itself and not for gain. It was thus that my ancestor worked a revolution, moralised the most demoralising of passions, and gave to France and the world the noble and difficult game which owes its name to him.”

“ What ! the game of piquet ? ”

“ Yes, sir, the game of piquet was invented at Troyes in the reign of Louis XIII by Maitre Jean Picquet, mayor and notary, my ancestor. More fortunate than Christopher Columbus, to whom he used jokingly to compare himself, the discoverer gave his name to his America. Alas ! what has it availed him to have thus associated himself for ever with the result of his studies ? Who now-a-days knows the origin of a game so universally played ? The books of rules, the books which ought to seek their inspiration in history and to inquire into its sources, even the books know nothing or wish to know nothing of the inventor. Would you believe, sir, that in an old edition of the rules of piquet, published by Sangrin, a bookseller, in the time of my ancestor, it is stated that the name of the game comes from one of the points in it called *pic* ! But from whence does the name *pic* come ? The malicious author does not say. Another writer pretends that the name piquet was given to the game, because it is very piquant. Nowhere have I found the truth

stated about the origin of this game, and that is one of my worries. And now, since Providence has brought you across my path, you, who are a writer, must swear to me that you will one day think of our conversation, of my prayer, and do justice to this unrecognised inventor ! ”

“ I swear,” I replied with a smile, but in a tone that implied more condescendence than faith.

“ Ah ! you are a sceptic,” she said to me, fixing her little piercing eyes upon me ; “ and why do you doubt ? ”

I declared to Mademoiselle Picquet that I thought the game of piquet was of more ancient date, and that, if I remembered rightly, it had been invented in the reign of Charles VII, after a ballet executed at Chinon.

“ Ah ! there we are ! ” exclaimed Mademoiselle Picquet with a mocking laugh, “ he also believes in the ballet ! Well, I will appeal to you ; you will see if this ingenious complication could result from an arrangement of pirouettes.”

She jumped up from her chair ; she took a book in which an often-read page was turned down, and turning to the page, she read the following passage from the first volume of Sainte-Foix’s “ Historical Essays on Paris ” : “ In 1676 there was played at the theatre of the hotel Guénégaud a comedy by Thomas Corneille, in five acts, called “ The Ladies’ Triumph,” which has not been printed, and of which the ballet of the game of piquet was one of the interludes. The four knaves first appeared with their halberds, to make way. Then the kings arrived successively, giving their hands to the queens, whose trains were borne by four slaves. The first of these slaves represented the game of tennis, the second the game of billiards, the third that of dice, and the fourth backgammon. The kings, the queens, and the knaves, after having formed tierces and fourteens in their evolutions, and having arranged themselves, the black on one side, the red on the other, wound up with a dance in which all the suits were intermingled without any order or arrangement.”

“ Well ! ” she said, “ here is a fine objection. What do you think of this so-called piquet ballet, in which billiards, dice, tennis, and backgammon figure ? I will admit that this ballet was intended to glorify the game, if you like, but how does that go against the pretensions of my family ? My ancestor died in 1680 at the age of sixty-eight, and was buried in the church of Saint-Pantaleon. Was not this ballet, executed in 1676, a homage to the inventor of the game ? ”

“ Yes,” I replied, “ but Sainte-Foix whom you have just quoted says that this famous ballet of 1676 was only a repetition of one which had been danced before Charles VII at Chinon.”

“ Oh ! oh ! you sceptic ! ” said Mademoiselle Argine, with smiling anger. “ You are, indeed, the child of your age ! Do you really believe that in the time of Charles VII people had time to think of this game so ingenious, so modern, and so calm in its

vivacity? War was the great game in those days. It is quite possible that they imagined a dance with costumes imitated from cards; but it is pushing imagination rather far to conclude from these fancies that the game of piquet had been already invented. But what have you to object against a family tradition religiously handed down to my time, and against the testimony of a native of Troyes, who is an authority in matters of local history?"

Then the invincible virgin took down a volume of Grosey's "Memoirs of the Celebrated Men of Troyes," and showed me the name and biography of her ancestor by the side of the names of Pierre and François Pithou.

This time I consented to be convinced. There was something communicative, too, in the assurance of Mademoiselle Picquet, a sort of enthusiasm illuminated her wrinkles.

"You do not know," she resumed with warmth, "all the real benefits and services that were rendered by the discovery of this illustrious game. Father Daniel published a dissertation on the subject which I ought to read to you."

I started.

"Oh, do not be afraid, I will not read it. It suffices for you to know that in 1720 old Daniel wrote a dissertation on piquet in which he clearly demonstrated that the game is symbolical, allegorical, political, and historical, and that it contains very important maxims on war and government."

"In truth, philosophy is a fine thing!" I said with a laugh.

"Will you deny, pitiless scoffer, that this game embodies a system, the precepts of which could be applied to human life? What is life if it be not a game?"

"Yes, a game at which one always loses."

"What do you know about it, young man?" replied the old maid, gravely. "When the stakes are divided on high how do you know that yours will not be doubled? But you have not come for a sermon. However, it may be that there is a curious study to be made, which would assist one in the study of human passions; it is that of the different games of cards in vogue at different periods of history. Do you think that people were not more calm and grave when they played piquet, before your bouillotte with its fevers had replied to the torments of your revolutionary hearts? In our days even bouillotte was not violent enough, rapid enough; you wanted an express railway game, and you have resuscitated the insolent lansquenet, that debauch of the guard-room!"

"I am sorry to contradict your theories," I said, with a shake of the head, "but whist, so cold, so diplomatic, and so silent, is the delight of the wild and impatient generation of which you speak."

"Great passions," she replied, "are never without great hypocrisies. Whist is a diplomatic game, as you have said. People play whist just as they starch their collars—to give themselves a severe, profound, English air. Has not diplomacy always been a lie?"

Whist is a mask. But your objection leads me to say something of the part I have taken as regards the inheritance of my family. The memory of my ancestor has always been venerated, and that portrait has been handed down with the religious respect that is attached to the sword of a hero. My father, in his filial piety, wished that my name should doubly indicate my birth, and so they gave me the name of the queen of clubs, Argine, the anagram of Regina. Yes, I am a queen, and my subjects are the knaves of hearts, diamonds, spades, and clubs. That is my kingdom, and when I die my dynasty will be extinct. In my youth, I loved cards, and as a girl I had a strange aptitude for the exact sciences and calculations, and I invented mathematical games that made my father and mother laugh. When the age of coquetry and love came I was rebellious, and my mother often used to say to me : ‘Argine, you will never marry ! we shall have to put you in a convent.’ Well, I came very near falling like any other woman. There was an officer of the Penthièvre regiment who used to come to Troyes to visit his family. He seemed to me as handsome as the god Mars, and he played at piquet like my ancestor. His name was Hector, like the knave of hearts ; and never was a glorious name more gloriously borne. I found a heart in looking at him. I used to dream of his uniform, of his sword ; I used to picture myself wearing his helmet and galloping at his side like Pallas, who has given her name to the queen of diamonds. He was a fine gentleman. But one day ——”

Mademoiselle Argine stopped. Her face showed that she felt strong emotion ; her hand trembled as she felt for her snuff-box on her knees.

“ Well,” I said, “ and what happened ? ”

“ Alas, he loved gaming, he loved it too much. One night after a game, blows were exchanged between the man I loved and a fellow who was trying to cheat him. Swords were drawn ; my handsome officer was killed. Oh ! I wept all my tears then, for since that time I have never felt my eyelids moist. There is his portrait ; didn’t I have good taste ? ”

While endeavouring to suppress her emotion with a little laugh, Mademoiselle Argine handed me her snuff-box. The lid represented a young and brilliant officer, and it seemed to me as if the fragile glass that covered his image had been worn thin by kisses.

“ I have never loved since,” continued the old maid ; “ I have remained faithful to his memory, and lived and grown old, as one lives and grows old in the provinces. Only instead of knitting or of breeding dogs and cats I have studied algebra. I found the old women of my age so foolish and so ridiculous that I have lived in isolation. For twenty years a fixed idea has been pursuing me and prolonging my life. I have set myself a great problem ; I have resolved to invent a game as simple and as ingenious as piquet, and yet as full of movement and violence as bouillote. If God will allow me to live for a year or two longer I shall succeed. I wish to

suppress chance completely, and to combine the cards in such a manner as to bring about a struggle of ingenuity, as at chess, with moments of repose, during which fancy, caprice, and instinct would have a chance to come into play. If you have still a few minutes to spare I will explain to you the first elements of this new game, which I wish to leave as a dying bequest to your generation, so old and at the same time so young."

I made a sign of assent. I was caught. I was expiating my curiosity. Hitherto I had been the victim only of her souvenirs ; now I was to submit to her craze.

Mademoiselle Argine drew up the little table, and then with cards and counters she entered upon a confused and laborious demonstration, which I utterly failed to follow. But I kept nodding my head regularly, as if I understood every move. This torture lasted nearly an hour. Happily Mademoiselle Picquet had not completely worked out her problem, otherwise I do not know how long the demonstration might have lasted.

As she opened the door for me the old maid pressed my hand, and said with solemnity : " Do not forget, young man, that I have revealed to you to-night the name of a benefactor of humanity. You have promised to repair the injustice by which his services have been forgotten ; keep your word."

I renewed my promise to the old lady, so artless in her enthusiasm, so sincere in her exaggeration, and I left her in doubt as to what conclusion I ought to draw from her confidences.

A few days afterwards I left Troyes. I have since learnt that Mademoiselle Argine is dead, and that the portrait of her ancestor was sold by auction. Had she solved her problem ? I do not think so. So the generation will have to be content with écarté, bouillotte, lansquenet, and whist. When will come the man who will realise the glorious synthesis of which Mademoiselle Argine dreamed, and which is destined to combine together the different emotions and calculations of all these games ?

Meanwhile, I have kept my word and I am learning piquet.

THE END.

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